

Neglected Australians : prisoners of war from the Western Front, 1916-1918

Author:

Regan, Patrick Michael

Publication Date:

2005

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.26190/unsworks/18074>

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**NEGLECTED AUSTRALIANS: PRISONERS OF WAR FROM
THE WESTERN FRONT, 1916 TO 1918**

PM Regan

A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts (Honours)

at the University College,

University of New South Wales

Australian Defence Force Academy

2005

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Accompanying this thesis is a copy of a map indicating where AIF POWs were held in Germany.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at UNSW, or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by others with whom I have worked at UNSW or elsewhere is explicitly acknowledged in the thesis.

I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, except to the extent that assistance from others in the project's design and conception or in style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.

Patrick Regan

ABSTRACT

About 3850 men of the First Australian Imperial Force were captured on the Western Front in France and Belgium between April 1916 and November 1918. They were mentioned only briefly in the volumes of the Official Histories, and have been overlooked in many subsequent works on Australia and the First World War.

Material in the Australian War Memorial has been used to address aspects of the experiences of these neglected men, in particular the Statements that some of them completed after their release

This thesis will investigate how their experiences ran counter to the narratives of CEW Bean and others, and seeks to give them their place in Australia's Twentieth Century experience of war.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Studies of this kind attract debts of gratitude to many people and institutions.

Associate Professor Robin Prior of HASS at University College, Australian Defence Force Academy, was kind enough to accept me as a student, and was then very patient as supervisor of this Study.

Without the assistance of staff at the Research Centre at the Australian War Memorial, it would not have been possible to undertake this Study. Both their resourcefulness and patience were extraordinary.

A valued friend, the late Pat Armstrong, set up the Access database that was used to manage the data extracted from the AWM Statements and other records that form the basis of this Study. His patience and interest were greatly appreciated.

Both Professor Peter Dennis of ADFA and Arthur Hoyle read the completed draft and made many valuable suggestions.

Staff at the National Library of Australia, the State Library of Victoria, the State Library of NSW, Mitchell Reading Room and, particularly, at the Academy Library, ADFA, were always patient and helpful.

ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

A/	Acting (i.e. temporary) rank
AAMC	Australian Army Medical Corps
ADB	Australian Dictionary of Biography
Admin	Administrative (as in Administrative HQ AIF, London)
AEF	American Expeditionary Force
AEMM&B Coy	Australian Electrical, Mechanical, Mining and Boring Company
AFC	Australian Flying Corps (RAAF from 1921)
AGPS	Australian Government Publishing Service
AIF	(First) Australian Imperial Force (1914 to 1921)
AIF Data	‘Australian Imperial Forces 1914-1920’, published by the Military Historical Society of Australia, ACT Branch, 1972
ALTM	Australian Light Trench Mortar (battery)
AMF	Australian Military Forces: militia forces
AMR&O	Australian Military Regulations and Orders
AN&MEF	Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (raised in 1914 to capture facilities in German New Guinea)
ANU	Australian National University
ARCS	Australian Red Cross Society
AROD	Australian Railway Operating Division
ATC	Australian Tunnelling Company
att	Attached to
AWM	Australian War Memorial
AWRS	Australian War Records Section
Bar	Second/subsequent award of a decoration, eg. MM and Bar
Bde	Brigade, eg. 1 st Brigade: four infantry battalions grouped together, reduced in all but four cases to three in 1918
Bdr	Bombardier (Corporal in the Artillery)

Bean	Dr CEW Bean (1879-1968): War Correspondent, Editor of the Official History, wrote six volumes
BEF	British Expeditionary Force: the Allied force to which the AIF belonged on the Western Front in France and Belgium from 1916 to 1918
Bn	Battalion, eg. 1 st Battalion
BRC	British Relief Committee (body within a POW camp)
BRCS	British Red Cross Society (the Australian Red Cross Society was a part of this body)
Bullecourt	Battles: 11 April 1917, in which many AIF were killed/wounded and captured, and May 1917
Butler	Dr AG Butler DSO (1872-1949): Medical officer, editor/author of the Official Medical History
Capt	Captain
CO	Commanding Officer (of a unit, eg. 1 st Battalion)
Col	Colonel
commando	Party of POWs sent from lager to work on a farm, in a factory, mine, etc.
comp	compiled by
Coy	Company, eg. A Company, 1 st Bn
Cpl	Corporal
CSM	Company Sergeant-Major: the senior NCO in a company. The more modern 'WO II' has been used.
DCM	Distinguished Conduct Medal: other than the Victoria Cross, the highest decoration for gallantry for an OR.
Div	Division, eg. 1st Division, shown as 1 st Div, etc
DSO	Distinguished Service Order: decoration for middle-ranking officers. Prestigious when awarded to a lieutenant for gallantry in action.
DVA	(Australian) Department of Veterans' Affairs
Dvr	Driver (Private soldier)
ed/s	editor/edited by
eg.	for example
Engrs	Engineers

ersatz	substitute (goods, of all types, in Germany)
Fd Amb	Field Ambulance
Fd Coy	Field Company
‘flu	Pneumonic influenza: the pandemic in 1918-1919. Also known as ‘Spanish influenza’ or at the time as ‘(la) grippe’.
fn	footnote
Fritz/es	German/s. They were also called ‘Boche’ or ‘Bosche’
Fromelles	Battle, 19/20 July 1916, in which many AIF were killed/wounded and captured
Gen	General
Gnr	Gunner (Private soldier in the Artillery)
GOC	General Officer Commanding, of a division (eg. GOC 5 th Div)
Hague Convention/s, The	International Agreement signed in The Hague about the Laws of War (1899 and 1907). ¹
HMAS	Her/His Majesty’s Australian Ship
HMSO	Her/His Majesty’s Stationery Office
H/LTM Bty	(Australian) Heavy/Light Trench Mortar Battery
HQ	Headquarters
i/c	in command. Thus, 2/ic: second in command (of a unit)
i.e.	that is
internee/s	Former POW(s) indefinitely living in a neutral country
kg	kilogram(s)
IWM	Imperial War Museum
Lager	German POW camp. Both words were used by officers and ORs.
Lazarette	(German) Hospital, sometimes also attached to a lager
L/Cpl	Lance Corporal (sometimes shown as ‘2 nd Corporal’)
LH	Light Horse (eg. 13 th LH Regt)
LOC	Lines of Communication (troops)
L/Sgt	Lance Sergeant

¹ The Germans and the British also signed bilateral agreements there in 1917 and 1918.

Lt	Lieutenant
Maj	Major
MC	Military Cross: decoration for officers
MG	Machine gun
MID	Mentioned in Despatches
MM/s	Military Medal(s): decoration for ORs
MSM	Meritorious Service Medal
Mss	manuscript
MUP	Melbourne University Press
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NCO	Non-commissioned officer (i.e. L/Cpl, Cpl, L/Sgt Sgt, S/Sgt, WO Class I/Class II)
nd	No date of publication given
NME	Non-military education scheme for the AIF in the UK 1918/1919, prior to returning to Australia
NR	Nominal Roll of Australians who served overseas 1914-1919, held by the Australian War Memorial (AWM 133)
NZ	New Zealand
OBE	Order of the British Empire
OH	The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, 12 vols, ed by CEW Bean, various authors, published from 1921 to 1942
OH M	The Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914-1918, three vols, ed by AG Butler, various authors, published from 1930 to 1943
OH WWII	Australia's Official History of the Second World War
OR/s	Other Rank/s: members of the AIF who were not commissioned as officers (including non-commissioned officers)
OUP	Oxford University Press
parcel/s	(Australian) Red Cross parcels sent three times per fortnight to Australian prisoners of war
Pl	Platoon, eg. No1 Platoon

Pnr	Pioneer (engineer)
POR	Prisoners of Respite: Allied POWs made to work just behind the German lines in 1917, as retaliation for alleged treatment of German prisoners in the UK
POW/s	Prisoner/s of War
PR/s	Private Record/s: letters, diaries, memoirs, held by the Australian War Memorial
Pte/s	Private/s (rank in the AIF)
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force (after 1921)
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps (British Army)
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RC POW	ARCS POW file, AWM Series 1DRL/428, so 'RC POW Box 221'
RC W	ARCS Wounded and Missing file, AWM Series 1DRL/428, so 'RC W 1690162'
Regt	Regiment (eg. 13th LH Regt)
Repatriation	Return of POW/s to the UK, later to Australia
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
RMO	Regimental Medical Officer (unit doctor)
RSL	Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia (now Returned and Services League)
RTA	Returned to Australia (the date the Service Record/ Nominal Roll gives for the return from the UK of a member of the AIF)
SBIO	Senior British Interned Officer (interned in Holland or Switzerland)
SBO	Senior British Officer (in a German POW camp)
Sgt/s	Sergeant/s
Sig/s	Signals or signaller (rank)
'Silly stand'	Disciplinary measure used by the Germans: standing to attention facing a wall for hours, in all weathers
SM	Sergeant-major: a senior NCO. WO II has been used in this Study.
Spr	Sapper (a Private soldier in Engineer units)

Sqn	Squadron, eg. No 2 Squadron AFC
S/Sgt	Staff Sergeant
Statement/s	Statement/s by Repatriated Prisoners of War, found in the Australian War Memorial, Official Records, Series 30 (AWM 30). Index of these Statements: AWM 139.
strafe	To punish, or a type of camp/lager (eg. a strafe camp)
T/	Temporary (rank)
TB	Tuberculosis
Tommy	British soldier
UK	United Kingdom
US/USA	United States of America
VC	Victoria Cross: the highest decoration for gallantry in the British Empire
VD	Venereal Disease
Vol/s	Volume/s
Western Front	Name given to the area of fighting in France and Belgium during the First World War
WO I/II	Warrant Officer, Class I/II
YMCA	Young Mens' Christian Association

INTRODUCTION

Prisoners of war in Australian history

There are considerable differences in the attention that has been given to Australians who became prisoners of war (POWs) and other soldiers.

During the Boer War in South Africa from 1899 to 1902, the Boers held about 100 Australians as prisoners for varying periods. A group interned near Pretoria was kept in poor sanitary conditions and given inadequate food before they were freed in June 1900. Because of the way the Boers fought, many others appear to have been held only for short periods, stripped of their arms and belongings and allowed to find their way back to their own lines. The number of men, and the short periods involved, perhaps explains why little has been written about them.¹

POWs were largely ignored in the official histories of Australia's involvement in the First World War.²

The Official History of participation in the Second World War consisted of 22 volumes, published in five series between 1952 and 1977.³

The Medical Series of this history was generous in its coverage of POWs. The first volume included a general chapter on medicine and surgery in captivity. In Volume II, a short chapter on prisoners of the Germans and Italians was followed by four chapters on POWs of the Japanese, totalling more than 150 pages, with another on their liberation. In addition, Volume IV devoted a chapter to the Royal Australian Navy's 381 POWs, part of another to the experiences of captured nurses and another short chapter on the return of prisoners of the Japanese.⁴

¹ Peter Dennis *et al*: 'The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History' (OUP, Melbourne, 1995), pp 472-473. There were few references to Australian prisoners in Craig Wilcox: 'Australia's Boer War: The War in South Africa 1899-1902' (OUP, Melbourne, 2002, in association with the Australian War Memorial (AWM)). See p 85 for the release of 'a great concentration of prisoners' from Waterval, near Pretoria.

² CEW Bean (ed): "The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918", 12 vols, various authors, (Angus & Robertson Ltd, Sydney, 1921 to 1942). Hereafter eg. 'OH, Vol III'. AG Butler (ed): "The Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914-1918" (AWM, Canberra, three volumes, 1930, 1940 and 1943). Hereafter, eg. 'OH M, Vol III'. See the Bibliography for full citations of the volumes consulted.

³ Gavin Long (ed): "Australia in the War of 1939-1945" (AWM, Canberra, various dates), hereafter 'OH WWII'.

⁴ *ibid*: Series Five (Medical), Vol I, Allan S Walker: 'Clinical Problems of War' (1952), pp 589-611; Vol II, Allan S Walker: 'Middle East and Far East' (1953), pp 400-418, 523-663, 664-674; Vol IV, Allan S Walker and others: 'Medical Services of the RAN and RAAF' (1961), pp 79-91, 447-455, 472-473.

A total of 7116 men of the Second Australian Imperial Force (AIF) were captured in the Middle East, Greece, Crete and Syria, of whom 242 died in captivity. Their experiences were set out in a lengthy appendix to a volume of the history.⁵

Between 1941 and 1945, over 20,000 Australians became POWs of the Japanese; about one-third died. Three chapters in one volume told of their fate and, because of the numbers involved and their treatment, it is not surprising that the focus of research on POWs has tended to be on these men.⁶

A total of 2026 members of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) were captured. A volume of the history included a chapter about what happened to those captured in Europe.⁷

In the Korean War, 1950-1953, 35 Australians were captured: 29 from the Army and six from the RAAF. The history of this conflict included a chapter on their treatment, written by one of those captured. In proportion to their number, this work contained more references to this group than to any other Australian POWs.⁸

No Australians have been captured during this country's involvement in wars and conflicts since 1953.

POWs in the First World War

During the First World War, almost 200 members of the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF) were captured by the Turks: 70 at Gallipoli, a further 11 in Mesopotamia, about 115 in Egypt. Although the numbers quoted vary, about 3850 men were later captured on the Western Front. About 1600, or 40 per cent of the total, were captured at Fromelles in July 1916 and at Bullecourt in April 1917. In addition to the killed and wounded from these and other battles, such losses had a considerable impact on units and comrades. Heavy casualties in 1916 and 1917 also had profound results for Australian politics and society.⁹

⁵ *ibid*: Series One (Army), Vol III, Barton Maughan: 'Tobruk and El Alamein' (1966), pp 755-822.

⁶ *ibid*: Series One (Army), Vol IV, Lionel Wigmore: 'The Japanese Thrust' (1957), pp 511-642. See, for example, Hank Nelson: 'Prisoners of War: Australians under Nippon' (ABC Enterprises, Sydney, 1985). Gavan McCormack and Hank Nelson (eds): 'The Burma-Thailand Railway: memory and history' (Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1993) cover the most significant episode. For one man's experience, see various books by Hugh V Clarke.

⁷ OH WWII, Series Three (Air), Vol IV, John Herington: 'Air Power over Europe, 1944-1945' (1963), pp 466-498.

⁸ Robert O'Neill: "Australia in the Korean War 1950-1953", Vol II: 'Combat Operations' (AWM and AGPS, Canberra, 1985), pp 533-569.

⁹ AWM 18, Item 9982/1/23, OH M, Vol III, Table 26, p 896. While OH, Vol VI, Appendix, p 1099, only had one figure (173 officers, 3911 other ranks (ORs), total 4084), OH M, Vol III, included totals

Between 1921 and 1942, CEW Bean edited the Official History (OH) and wrote six volumes: 11 narratives and another of photographs. In the four volumes he wrote about the AIF on the Western Front, from 1916 to 1918, Bean referred to the capture of individuals and groups in his narrative and included a few of their experiences in footnotes: five lines for those captured at Fromelles, with longer entries for those captured at Bullecourt in 1917 and at Dernancourt in 1918.¹⁰

AG Butler edited the less influential Medical History, and wrote two of its three volumes. There were as many references in Volume II to the use of German prisoners carrying wounded Australians as there were to AIF POWs. Volume III included more on British medical officers fighting typhus in POW camps than on the fate of AIF prisoners. While they were included in the statistics of the war, in a chapter titled 'The War-Damaged Soldier' there was no indication that POWs' experiences during and after the war differed from those of the rest of the AIF.¹¹

Significantly, those who had been prisoners were not mentioned in Bean's apotheosis for the First AIF, in the last chapter of Volume VI of the OH. His linkage of the qualities shown at the Landing at Gallipoli to the resulting national self-image largely excluded those that had been captured. While they were not removed from the 'famous army of generous men', the description of the AIF marching 'down the long lane' of national history did not reflect the experiences of former prisoners.¹²

An amount of material on the experiences of POWs from the conflict was available, in the Australian War Memorial (AWM) and elsewhere. Many works on Australians in the First World War did not mention them, including many of the unit histories. One of the finest books written on the Australian experience in that war included the number taken, but referred to them in the context of casualties on the Western Front. Since the early 1990s, a number of publications including unit histories have mentioned POWs.¹³

of 4084 (Table 10, p 880, and Table 37, p 908) and 4044 (Table 26, p 896). The most frequently used figure for those captured on the Western Front appears to be 3848 men: see the Note on Sources and Numbers below. For the impact on Australian society, see OH, Vol XI (*passim*), and LL Robson: 'The First AIF: A Study of its Recruitment' (MUP, 1970).

¹⁰ OH, Vol III, p 442, fn 138, Vol IV, pp 342-343, fn 189 and Vol V, pp 395-397, fn 67.

¹¹ OH M: Vol II, p 1002; Vol III, pp 879-980 (*passim*); Chapter XVI, pp 787-844.

¹² OH, Vol VI, pp 1093-1096, specifically pp 1095, 1096. See Martin Ball: 'Re-Reading Bean's Last Paragraph', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol 34, No 122, October 2003, p 244, for a recent view of Bean's casting of the Australian soldier as the symbol of the nation.

¹³ Bill Gammage: 'The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War' (Penguin, 1975), pp 94, 153, 159, 184. POWs of the Turks have probably been overlooked to a greater extent than those of the Germans; see Greg Kerr: 'Lost Anzacs: The Story of Two Brothers' (OUP, Melbourne, 1997).

In keeping with the ideas of their time, official histories of the First World War were written with a primarily operational focus. Thus, although substantial numbers of soldiers from United Kingdom units were captured on the Western Front, they were not mentioned in the volumes of the UK Official History.¹⁴

Neither of the Official Histories of Canada in the war, ‘encyclopaedic in their scope’, made any significant reference to that nation’s POWs. From April 1915, about as many Canadians as Australians were captured on the Western Front. Their experiences in captivity were similar, and some were interned together in Holland.¹⁵

The experiences of the New Zealanders captured on the Western Front were also ignored in that nation’s Official History of its involvement in the First World War.¹⁶

International Conventions and modern war

The First World War occurred after a long and unusual period of peace during which, from 1815 to 1914, wars between the nations of Europe were generally short and limited. In the absence of general wars, a movement had developed to regulate and humanise war within a legal framework: a liberal tradition of captivity within the legal framework of Conventions signed in 1907. Speed argued that these documents represented a combination of the Enlightenment’s faith in the ability of reason to triumph over instinct, and an Anglo-American faith in the efficacy of law restraining ‘the brutal passions of war’.¹⁷

This conflict was unlike those Nineteenth Century wars. One of its new aspects was the number of prisoners taken and dependent on their captors for as long as the war lasted. While it was expected to be over by Christmas 1914, the conflict continued into 1915 and beyond, with the number of prisoners increasing. By

¹⁴ See the Bibliography for the UK Official History. See Chapter 1 for the numbers of POW taken from a number of countries.

¹⁵ Desmond Morton: ‘Silent Battle: Canadian Prisoners of War in Germany, 1914-1919’ (Lester Publishing, Toronto, 1992), p x. As one of the few systematic studies of First World War POWs, this work has been used to supplement the experiences of the Australians. It used the records of the experiences in captivity of about 700 Canadians. The total number of Canadian POWs varies with the source.

¹⁶ “Official History of New Zealand’s Effort in the Great War”, Vol II, France: Colonel H Stewart: ‘The New Zealand Division 1916-1919: A Popular History Based on Official Records’ (Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, Auckland, 1921). There is some agreement that 464 men were captured.

¹⁷ Richard B Speed III: ‘Prisoners, Diplomats and the Great War: A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity’ (Greenwood Press, New York, 1990), pp 5, 6.

February 1915, there were 625,000 Allied prisoners in German camps, some 2.5 million by the end of the war.¹⁸

The Nineteenth Century's liberal tradition was particularly reflected in the provisions of the 1907 Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, known as The Hague Convention. It was one of 14 Conventions signed at The Hague on 18 October 1907, and addressed the treatment of POWs at Articles IV to XX of Chapter II in the Annex to the document.¹⁹

In the preamble, the Parties stated that it had been necessary 'to complete and explain' the work of the Peace Conference in 1899 that had framed an earlier Convention. They recognised that it had not been possible to deal with all the circumstances that could arise and, until a more complete codification of the laws of war could be issued, declared that inhabitants and belligerents 'remain under the protection and rule of the principles of the laws of nations'.

This Convention included a 'general participation clause' so that, because some belligerents were not Parties and although it had generally entered into force, it was not technically applicable to the conflict. Even if belligerents were only impelled by the possibility of retaliation against their own men, this Convention governed how POWs were treated during the war. Most combatant nations attempted to live up to its provisions.²⁰

The Statements completed by some men on their return from captivity, now held in Series 30 of the Official Records at the AWM, did not provide evidence that captured Australians knew of the provisions of The Hague Convention in detail. For example, many other ranks tried to resist when they were allocated work related to the 'operations of war'. Only officers were exempt under its provisions, and those non-commissioned officers (NCOs) who refused to work drew attention to another of the Convention's deficiencies.²¹

¹⁸ *ibid*, p 7.

¹⁹ The 1907 Convention was known as 'Hague IV', 'The Hague Convention' or 'The Hague Rules'. It had been preceded by The Convention with Respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land, one of six conventions signed at The Hague on 29 July 1899. For a list of these conventions, see Leon Friedman (ed) 'The Law of War: A Documentary History', Vol 1 (Random House, New York, 1972), pp v-vii. Quotations from conventions in this Study are from this source. Some other 1907 conventions contained articles relevant to POWs; see Andrew Roberts and Richard Guelff: 'Documents on the Laws of War' (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982), p 215.

²⁰ Article II. Roberts and Guelff, p 10; Speed, p 7, referred to the Convention's 'fatal flaw'.

²¹ Work related to the 'operations of war' was explicitly forbidden by Article VI of the Convention.

This Convention could not have addressed all the problems that arose. It did not separate the treatment of POWs from other regulations governing the conduct of war. During the conflict, many provisions were seen to be obsolescent and inapplicable to modern warfare. Others were vague and unclear especially as they applied to POWs, and there were disagreements about precise obligations under international law.²²

Several belligerents negotiated comprehensive bilateral agreements to overcome the various ambiguities: Germany negotiated two such agreements with France, one with the USA and two with Great Britain. They sought to provide, and then to expand, guidelines covering such matters as medical examinations for internment or exchange, punishments for escapees, physical conditions in camps and siting working parties at least 30 kilometres from the front lines.²³

Article XXI of the Annex to The Hague Convention stated that the obligations of belligerents to the sick and wounded 'are governed by the Geneva Convention': the Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field, signed at Geneva on 6 July 1906.²⁴

Article II of the Geneva Convention required that, subject to the care that had to be taken under Article I, the sick and wounded that fell into the other belligerent's hands, 'become prisoners of war, and the general rules of international law...become applicable to them.' Under this Article, belligerents had the power to make bi-lateral agreements about:

the return of wounded left on the battlefield;

the return to their own country of sick and wounded, and

internment of the sick and wounded in a neutral country.

It was on the basis of this Article that some of the AIF were exchanged to the UK, or interned in Holland or Switzerland during the war.²⁵

Under the provisions of Article IX, personnel charged with 'the removal, transportation and treatment' of the sick and wounded were to be 'respected and

²² Speed, pp 184-185; Roberts and Guelff, p 215.

²³ Roberts and Guelff, p 215; Speed, pp 7, 38, 185.

²⁴ This Convention was developed from that signed in Geneva on 22 August 1864.

²⁵ See Chapter 8.

protected under all circumstances'. If they were captured, 'they shall not be considered as prisoners of war.'²⁶

While the existence of these Conventions probably saved POWs from grossly bad treatment, that protection was not universal. Much depended on the character of the commandant of the camp to which a POW was sent. Other officers and guards took their cues from these officers; there were many examples of ill-treatment, however minor, of Australians from both commandants and their staffs.²⁷

Although it happened in many different ways, surrendering was difficult and dangerous. It was discouraged by all armies, including the AIF. While this war changed the weight of individual responsibility, because technology had made it easier for individuals and groups to be overwhelmed, there was still an odour of disgrace in being captured. Reflecting the attitudes of the period, many ex-POWs were possibly ashamed of their fate and unlikely to publicise it. This war had been fought far from Australia, and it was difficult if not impossible for most men to convey their experiences to those that had stayed behind. Some of these attitudes remained unchanged for many years.²⁸

It is not surprising that some AWM 30 Statements did not deal with life in captivity in great detail. Their purpose was operational: to clarify how a man was captured, to supplement other accounts about what had happened, not to deal with what happened after capture. While they are often brief, they have an immediacy not found in later books and memoirs.²⁹

This Study sets out the experiences of some of these neglected Australians from the Western Front, based principally on the extensive and voluminous collection in the AWM: Series 30 Statements, AIF, Red Cross and private records.³⁰

²⁶ This provision covered sanitary sections and chaplains, as well as medical personnel such as stretcher bearers.

²⁷ OH M, Vol III, p 893, fn 3; Daniel J McCarthy: 'The Prisoner of War in Germany' (Skeffington & Son Ltd, London, 1938), p 20; Lawrence James: 'Warrior Race: The British Experience of War from Roman Times to the Present' (Little, Brown and Company, London, 2001), p 497.

²⁸ Samuel Hynes: 'The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War' (Penguin, New York, 1997), pp 232-233. See Mark Connelly and Walter Miller: 'The BEF and the Issue of Surrender on the Western Front in 1940', *War in History*, Vol 11, No 4, November 2004, p 437, for a comment from a British officer captured in 1940: there was a 'very distinct aura of shame about anybody who'd surrendered unwounded in the Great War, a stigma if you like.'

²⁹ See the Note on Sources and Numbers below for AWM 30, Official Records, AWM.

³⁰ For the neglect of POWs, see Joan Beaumont: 'Rank, Privilege and Prisoners of War', *War and Society*, Vol 1, No1, May 1983, p 67: she saw them as 'among the forgotten victims of war'. The Bibliography lists the POW's books, private records/manuscripts in the AWM and libraries.

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW

The structure of this Study

The moment of capture was significant for POWs. As they were intended to provide operational information, AWM 30 Statements gave varying amounts of detail. Both the Official History and these Statements included examples of men shot as the result of misunderstandings, or malice, as they surrendered or later. In combat, many were surrounded and out of ammunition, but many others were wounded and incapable of continuing to fight.¹

After capture, interrogations were carried out with varying degrees of rigour. The Australians were treated in a range of ways: the wounded were treated behind the lines; some ORs were badly treated in an old French fort and then sent on working parties within range of Allied shellfire. Most were soon sent to one of the large number of camps or hospitals set up for POWs in Germany. These experiences will be examined in Chapter 2.²

From the time Australians were captured in substantial numbers in July 1916, Germany was increasingly unable to feed its people and this had some implications for its neutral neighbours as well as for its prisoners. Chapter 3 will examine how POWs were fed in hospital, on journeys, in the lagers and on commando.

Chapter 4 begins with some analysis, from 1919, of the impact of captivity on POWs. While many Statements by former POWs did not include much detail on daily life in the camps in Germany, some included it in later memoirs. Although there are not many such Australian publications from the First World War, because of the many memoirs from the later war, it is a familiar landscape.

Among the other shortages, Germany did not have enough workers. It had not planned for a long war and, early in the conflict, allowed many skilled workers to enlist. Demands for more advanced weaponry and the need for more sophisticated handling of a range of raw materials placed great pressure on its manpower. From early in the war, it had taken large numbers of prisoners for whom work could be

¹ See the Note on Sources and Numbers, and Appendix 1, for the origins and purpose of the AWM 30 Statements. See Neville Browning: 'The Blue and White Diamond: The History of the 28th Battalion 1915-1919' (Advance Press, Perth, 2002), p 170, for an account of a shooting after capture.

² The map accompanying this thesis indicates where Australians were held in Germany.

found to benefit its cause. Some of the work AIF prisoners were forced to do, and the way they were treated, was contrary to the provisions of The Hague Convention of 1907 and will be considered in Chapter 5.³

While escape was not possible for many AIF prisoners, at least 46 men reached neutral frontiers: almost all ORs. As escaping from German custody was difficult, a greater number made one or more unsuccessful attempts. Good plans and preparations did not always guarantee success. There were penalties for failure but, particularly for officers, it seems that preparing was as important as actual escapes. Escaping, including definitions of ‘successful’, will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Many of the AIF were wounded when they were captured, especially at Fromelles and Bullecourt. From the moment of capture, they were dependant on the Germans for treatment and this varied considerably at every stage. Some were to be injured while in German custody, others became ill as a result of the treatment they received. With the rations they received, medical matters were the most significant issues for the POWs: the sick and wounded saw the consequences of a range of shortages within Germany. Chapter 7 will show that many men who had been sick and wounded devoted considerable space in their Statements to their treatment.

It was possible to leave Germany other than by escaping from a camp, but a heavy cost could already have been levied on the individual. Seriously ill and wounded prisoners were exchanged to the UK in significant numbers. An agreement between the British and German Governments, at The Hague in July 1917, made it easier for those that had been POWs for more than 18 months to be interned in neutral countries.⁴

Many former prisoners found that, while internment was better than a lager, it was not everything that they had expected. Because of shortages in neutral countries, the poor quantity and quality of food was a common complaint. In spite of attempts to arrange work and classes, time passed slowly in Switzerland and Holland for those interned. Exchange and internment will be the subject of Chapter 8.

Before POWs could return to Australia at the end of the war, they had to be ‘repatriated’ to the UK. In that country, as well as in the lagers and in internment, the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 took its toll. Once back in the UK, and following

³ For international conventions governing the treatment of POWs, and the sick and wounded, see the Introduction.

⁴ For consideration of the effects of captivity, see Chapter 4.

any medical treatment and ‘furlough’ for a month, it was generally about an additional six weeks before a soldier left the UK to return to Australia.⁵

At the end of 1918, the Department of Repatriation and Demobilisation headed by Lieutenant General Sir John Monash, took over responsibility for the return of the AIF, including POWs. As they completed their Statements immediately on return to the UK, there are no indications of the number of the ex-POWs that took advantage of the various educational opportunities available in the UK before they returned to Australia. Consideration of the movement of the POWs from captivity or internment, back to the UK and from there to Australia in Chapter 9 will be followed by the Conclusions in Chapter 10.⁶

Prisoners in the First World War

As with most First World War figures, there is no agreement on the number of men captured: one source said 8 million, another 5 million. It is also difficult to compare the numbers from different nations: for example, only total numbers of French and Russian soldiers mobilised was included in one compilation, and there was no separation of ‘missing’ and ‘prisoners’ for the Germans.⁷

The following figures include prisoners from all theatres and take no account of varying losses in different campaigns. Nevertheless, they give an indication of numbers from a range of nations, and provide some comparisons between them.⁸

⁵ Apart from those who were discharged and remained in the UK, discharge from the AIF took place after a soldier’s return to Australia, often after further medical treatment.

⁶ See ‘The History of the Department of Repatriation and Demobilisation from November 1918 to September 1919’ (Ede & Townsend Ltd, London, 1919). Monash ordered the preparation of this document: Geoffrey Serle: ‘John Monash: A Biography’ (MUP in association with Monash University, 1982), p 411.

⁷ Jay Winter and Blaine Baggett: ‘1914-18: The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century’ (BBC Books, London, 1996), p 237; Peter Dennis *et al*: ‘The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History’ (OUP, Melbourne, 1995), p 472. AG Butler (ed): ‘The Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914-1918’, three vols (Australian War Memorial, Canberra) (hereafter, eg. ‘OH M, Vol III’). Vol III, Chapter XVII, Tables 5 to 10, pp 868-880 (*passim*); see the Bibliography for a full citation. While Vol II included some statistics, at pp 860-865, those in Vol III were more detailed., including figures for most major combatants and, in some cases, the basis for these figures. A publication setting out AIF casualties by unit will be used later in this Chapter.

⁸ These figures were taken from OH M, Vol III, Tables 5 and 10, pp 868 and 880 respectively, supplemented by other material, as shown in each nation’s case.

NATION	A. MOBILISED*/ EMBARKED	B. CAPTURED/MISSING	B as % A
France	8.2 million	252,700	3.08
USA	2.04 million	4480	0.22
UK	5.4 million	170,389	3.15
Canada	422,405	3729	0.88
India	1.338 million	3762	0.28
NZ	98,950	530	0.53
Australia	331,781	4044/4084	1.2
Russia	15.1 million*	3.95 million	26.12
Germany	4.2 million	771,659	18.37

From about 40 million people, France mobilised over 8 million soldiers, of whom 1.457 million died. Figures for French POWs were inferred from two other sources and indicated, with qualifications, that 252,700 men were captured.⁹

The US mobilised 4.355 million troops from a population of 102 million; over 2 million troops ‘took to the field’, just over 51,600 died in combat; 4,480 were captured, of whom 373 died in captivity. This was a substantial number from a nation that did not enter the war until April 1917, and did not have many troops on the Western Front until the middle of 1918.¹⁰

From a population of about 392 million, the British Empire mobilised nearly 8.5 million troops, of whom nearly 898,000 died. Of the 7.750 million troops that took to the field, a total of 182,914 became prisoners. The greatest number by far was from the UK: 170,389 (of 5.399 million troops that took to the field). French and British forces lost more than 3 per cent of those that took the field.

Canada, India and New Zealand each lost as prisoners considerably less than 1 per cent of their men who embarked for service. At 1.2 per cent, the proportion of AIF POWs was significantly higher than from those nations.¹¹

⁹ OH M, Vol III: Tables 5, p 868 (8.19 million), and 6, p 870 (8.41 million)

¹⁰ *ibid*: Tables 5, p 868, and 7, p 872. ‘The Official Record of the United States’ Part in the Great War’ (no publication details, 1920), p 135. While the term was not defined, ‘took to the field’ has been taken to mean ‘embarked for overseas service’.

¹¹ *ibid*: Tables 5, p 868, and 10, p 880. The figures for the Empire were from ‘Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War’ (War Office, March 1922), p 237, to 31 December 1922. See below for the number of AIF POWs.

All of these figures were dwarfed by the Imperial Russian experience. Before it left the war, from 182 million people the Russian Empire mobilised over 15 million men, of whom nearly 4 million were categorised as 'Missing and Prisoners'. It has been estimated that 2.4 million men became POWs, about 1.3 million in 1915.¹²

From a population of 68 million, Germany mobilised nearly 13.4 million troops, of whom 4.183 million 'took to the field' and nearly 1.062 million died. It is not clear how many of the 771,659 'missing and prisoners' were POWs. Figures for the Austrians, Turks and Bulgarians were not detailed but they also indicated substantial numbers of 'missing and prisoners', especially from Austria-Hungary.¹³

The figures for German losses were drawn from works published in 1934 and 1922, for the war until 31 July 1918. The Official Medical Historian made no attempt to compare German with British and Australian casualties because the 'categories, and the levels at which figures were recorded, are not parallel.'¹⁴

The First AIF

As there is no agreement on total AIF enlistments or embarkations for service overseas, it is not surprising that there are different figures for the total number of POWs and the number captured on the Western Front in particular. According to one authority, from about 4.8 million people, 416,809 Australians enlisted and 331,781 embarked for service overseas with the AIF. A total of 4044 were captured: about 200 by the Turks and about 3850 in 'France and Flanders'.¹⁵

A total of 3011 troops enlisted for service overseas in the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (AN&MEF). This force was raised in August 1914 to capture facilities in German New Guinea and establish a garrison there. Ex-AN&MEF personnel later joined the AIF, served on the Western Front and were captured; 11 were included in the Sample of AWM 30 Statements used in this Study.¹⁶

¹² *ibid*: Table 8, p 868. See NN Golovin: 'The Russian Army in World War I' (Facsimile Edition by Archon Books, 1969, of the Yale University Press edition, 1931), Table 9, p 98; p 222. There were many Russian POWs in camps in Germany.

¹³ *ibid*: Table 5, p 868.

¹⁴ OH M, pp 871-872, 876. After 31 July 1918, German 'records were confused and unreliable'.

¹⁵ OH M, Vol III: Table 26, p 896: Table 27. However, Table 10, p 880, showed 4084 AIF POWs.

¹⁶ *ibid*: Table 11, p 882. For the AN&MEF, see CEW Bean (ed): "The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918", 12 vols, various authors, (Angus & Robertson Ltd, Sydney, 1921 to 1942) (hereafter eg. 'OH, Vol III'). Vol X, pp 5-6, 26; see the Bibliography for a full citation. The AN&MEF's Nominal Roll, AWM 190, showed those who later joined the AIF. See the Note on Sources and Numbers below for these Statements and the Sample used as the basis of this Study.

About 9 per cent of AIF POWs died in German hands: 267 of wounds after capture, 70 of other causes. By comparison, of about 200 men captured by the Turks, 39 men died in captivity, while another 21 died of wounds in their hands. This was about 30 per cent of the total number.¹⁷

However many Australians were captured on the Western Front between 1916 and 1918, by comparison with some of the numbers set out above, they were a small group. It is significant that they were treated as if they were 'British', as were other men from the Empire fighting in what they saw as a common cause.¹⁸

This Study only deals with those Australians captured on the Western Front. The number captured by the Turks on Gallipoli, in Egypt and Mesopotamia was small and the treatment of ORs was particularly harsh, resulting in the high death rate noted above. The number captured on the Western Front allowed a range of experiences to be included in the Sample of AWM 30 Statements on which this Study was based.¹⁹

While each individual had a story, various groups were treated differently. The severely wounded were sent to hospitals in Germany, and were generally exchanged quite quickly or interned in neutral countries. They had to live with tedium, pain and, often, the loss of a limb or impaired functions as a result of their wounds. Men with less serious wounds were hospitalised until they recovered and then sent to lagers.

One man's experiences show what happened to the wounded. His right arm badly injured at Bullecourt, he spent four months in the lazarette at a big lager. This was a very quiet time as he had nothing to do and 'it got very tiresome looking at barbed wire all day long.' From mid-August to the end of November 1917, at another camp: 'things were a bit better and I saw a bit more life.' There were many other Australians there and, in the circumstances, they had a good time.²⁰

Especially from 1917, unwounded ORs could remain behind the German lines on working parties; they were worked until they were of no further use, and then sent to Germany. Some Australians captured in April 1918 remained behind the lines until

¹⁷ OH M: Table 31, p 901, Table 32, p 902. Table 26, p 896, included POWs who died of wounds. Dennis *et al*, at p 473, said about 25 per cent died. The number of former POWs who had died by 1921 was not given.

¹⁸ See Desmond Morton: 'Silent Battle: Canadian Prisoners of War in Germany 1914-1919' (Lester Publishing, Toronto, 1992), pp 14, 37, 43-44.

¹⁹ For Turkish treatment of POWs, see TW White: 'Guests of the Unspeakable' (Hamilton, London, 1928), John Halpin: 'Blood in the Mists' (Macquarie Head Press, Sydney, 1934) and Greg Kerr: 'Lost Anzacs: The Story of Two Brothers' (OUP, Melbourne, 1997). AJ Evans, an RFC officer, was a captive of both the Germans (July 1916 to June 1917) and the Turks (from March 1918): see 'The Escaping Club' (John Lane The Bodley Head Ltd, London, 1921).

²⁰ AWM 30, B13.22: Pte ES Sadler (16th Bn).

November 1918. Others went straight to the lagers and were then sent ‘on commando’ to a range of jobs where the treatment varied greatly. Some were engaged on a range of fatigues to keep the lagers functioning.

The major battles

Australians began to arrive in France from Egypt in March 1916, and units from 2nd Division moved into the Front Line from 6 April. By the end of June 1916, about three weeks before the AIF’s first major action, there were 35,123 Australians on the Western Front. Their numbers peaked at 124,337 in the middle of 1918.²¹

This Study does not deal with all the AIF prisoners of the Germans from the Western Front, but it sought to include enough to tell, with a range of other material, the story of this neglected group. While many men were captured by themselves or in small groups on other occasions, most were captured in three major battles on the Western Front: about 40 per cent at the battles of Fromelles on 19/20 July 1916, or at the first battle of Bullecourt on 11 April 1917.²²

Fromelles, in the area of Aubers Ridge, has been described as ‘a poorly conceived and executed diversionary attack’ to assist the main Somme offensive, and as ‘one of the most misconceived operations’ on the Western Front. Bean stated that about 400 of the AIF were captured, Butler said 470. Whichever figure was correct, it was part of casualties of over 5500 men from 5th Div units.²³

The battle at Bullecourt was an attempt to penetrate the German Hindenburg Line around that fortified village. Tanks failed to assist the infantry and it fought without support, cut off from reinforcements and additional ammunition. Six and half battalions and supporting units of 4th Div suffered over 3000 casualties, of whom 28 officers and 1142 ORs were captured: ‘much the largest number of Australians taken by the enemy in a single battle.’ As few of those wounded beyond the Australian wire escaped, POWs included a great number of wounded: of nine captured 16th Bn officers, seven were wounded and one later died in captivity. The average loss per

²¹ OH, Vol III, pp 71,92; OH M, Vol III, Table 36, p 907.

²² See Note on Sources and Numbers for the selection of the AWM 30 Statements used in this Study.

²³ Dennis *et al*, pp 225, 654-655; Chris Coulthard-Clark: ‘Where Australians Fought: The Encyclopaedia of Australia’s Battles’ (Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1998), p116. OH, Vol III, pp 442, 447. Numbers in OH M, Vol II, p 48, were for the period from noon, 19 July to 8pm, 21 July 1916. AD Ellis, in ‘The Story of the Fifth Division’ (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1920), gave the casualties as 178 officers and 5335 ORs: 5513 men.

unit was ‘almost exactly four-fifths’ of the men involved, and the heaviest losses were from 4th Bde units: 2339 of the 3000 men committed.²⁴

About 290 men were captured during the third major battle, on 5 April 1918 at Dernancourt, during the German advance.²⁵

As part of the Allied attacks on the Somme, between 20 July and 3 September 1916, three AIF divisions each attacked Pozieres and Mouquet Farm more than once. In this period, 498 Australians were captured.²⁶

In 1916, 995 of the AIF were captured (representing 2.11 per cent of the overall force for that year), 2295 in 1917 (or 2.64 per cent) and 558 in 1918 (0.85 per cent), a total of 1.93 per cent of the force. Butler analysed the total, 3848 men, by listing numbers captured in each quarter from the beginning of 1916.²⁷

Nevertheless, the number of men captured, together with the killed and wounded from battles such as Fromelles and Bullecourt, had their impacts on units and individuals. Bean stated that 5th Div was ‘crippled’ by Fromelles and that it did not regain its full self-confidence until the end of the summer of 1916.²⁸

At the beginning of his account of Bullecourt, he referred to 4th Div as ‘a magnificent instrument, at the zenith of its efficiency’; after the battle, it was ‘a magnificent instrument recklessly shattered’. One unit history stated that the 4th Bde losses in this battle ‘were appalling’. Other histories referred to ‘depleted ranks’, to the ‘sadly reduced battalion’, and to a ‘weary and dispirited band’.²⁹

Varying numbers of prisoners

There were considerable differences in POW numbers from the five AIF divisions. The 3rd, the last to be formed, arrived in France in November 1916 and was sent to the ‘quiet line at Armentieres’. By then, 5th Div had lost large numbers at

²⁴ Dennis *et al.*, p 657; Coulthard-Clark, p 125; OH, Vol IV, pp 342-343, 343-344.

²⁵ Dernancourt is south of Albert in France. By April 1918, the ability of the AIF to replace losses was much less than in 1916.

²⁶ RJH Noble: ‘Raising the White Flag: The Surrender of Australian Soldiers in France during the Great War’. Unpublished BA (Hons) thesis, University College ADFA, UNSW, 1988, p 12.

²⁷ OH M: Table 37, p 908; Table 38, p 909; Table 40, p 911; Table 41, p 912.

²⁸ OH, Vol III, p 447. See Ronald J Austin: ‘Black and Gold: The History of the 29th Battalion, 1915-1918’ (Slouch Hat Publications, McCrae, Vic, 1997), p 41, for the impact on one man.

²⁹ OH, Vol IV, pp 281, 350. Newton Wanliss: ‘The History of the Fourteenth Battalion, AIF’ (The Arrow Printery, Melbourne, 1929), p 209; Lt TP Chataway, revised/ed by Lt Col Paul Goldentdt: ‘History of the 15th Battalion Australian Imperial Forces, War 1914-1918’ (William Brooks & Co, Brisbane, 1948), p 174; W Devine: ‘The Story of a Battalion’ (Melville & Mullen Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 1919), p 78 (48th Bn); C Longmore: ‘The Old Sixteenth’ (History Committee, Battalion Association, Perth, 1929), p 136.

Fromelles in July, and the other three had suffered heavy losses at Pozieres and Mouquet Farm. 3rd Div was not to be involved in heavy fighting until the battle of Messines in June 1917: by then, 4th Div had lost heavily again at Bullecourt.³⁰

By 1918, the five divisions had acquired different identities. While 4th Div had the reputation of being the most rugged of the five, 3rd Div had perhaps been most carefully 'broken in', and was regarded as the best trained and the most disciplined, but not necessarily the best at fighting. Although 4th Div caused more disciplinary trouble, it 'was the most used and hardest fighting.'³¹

Figures in AIF Data supported these views: of the 3771 men captured from divisional units, those from 4th Div far exceeded the others:³²

1st: 12 officers, 471 ORs

2nd: 23 officers, 454 ORs

3rd: 10 officers, 151 ORs

4th: 68 officers, 2008 ORs

5th: 17 officers, 557 ORs.³³

Just as the smallest number captured was from 3rd Div, so it produced the smallest number of Statements and the smallest number of escapers.

While the time it spent in combat accounted for the smaller number of POWs from 3rd Div units, substantially higher numbers of POWs from the other divisions raised other issues. For example, it is true that some commanders were more aggressive than others. The first CO of 48th Bn, Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier) RL Leane, was known as an aggressive leader: 'a stern, hard man in the conception and performance of his personal duty'. Of the total of 12 officers and 441 ORs captured from 12th Brigade battalions, 3 officers and 216 ORs were from 48th Bn.³⁴

³⁰ OH, Vol III, p 950. Albert Palazzo: 'Defenders of Australia: The 3rd Australian Division, 1916-1991' (Australian Military History Publications, Loftus, NSW, 2002), pp 21, 23.

³¹ OH, Vol V, p 4. Jane Ross: 'The Myth of the Digger: The Australian Soldier in Two World Wars' (Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1985), p 218, fn 32.

³² AIF Data, p 15. This figure (130 officers and 3641 ORs) included POWs from Divisional Light Trench Mortar Batteries, MG and engineer units, but excluded 18 officers and 73 ORs shown as 'Corps Troops' and personnel from Lines of Communication (LOC) units.

³³ *ibid.* If 4th Bde units lost a total of 40 officers and 1218 ORs as POWs 1916-1918, the other 4th Div units lost 28 officers and 790 ORs. The full strength of an AIF infantry battalion in 1914 was about 1020 men, including 31 officers; by July 1918, the establishment was 900 ORs but, because of the shortage of men, this could not be achieved: 11 AIF battalions were disbanded in 1918.

³⁴ W Devine: 'The Story of a Battalion' (Melville & Mullen Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 1919), p 84. During the First World War, 'Brigadier-General' was used.

While Brigadier HE ('Pompey') Elliott was at the next level of command, he was also an aggressive leader, yet only 22 ORs were captured from 15th Bde battalions.³⁵

Perhaps the numbers captured from each unit was a matter of luck, just as it was for individual soldiers: whether they were wounded or captured and, if so, to which lager they were sent, the work they were given and the overall treatment they received.

³⁵ Elliott was CO of 7th Bn at Gallipoli in August 1915 when its personnel won four VCs.

CHAPTER 2

CAPTURE AND ITS IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES

Dilemmas

There were many reasons why soldiers surrendered in the First World War. It was common to be wounded and/or surrounded without the means of continuing the fight. The prospect of a loss of liberty, uncertainty about the length of the conflict, together with discipline, feelings of honour and loyalty to a unit, and above all to comrades, could however keep men fighting in some situations.¹

Chapter II of the Annex to The Hague Convention (1907) dealt with POWs. Article IV stated that prisoners 'are in the power of the hostile Government, but not of the individuals or corps who captured them', but it did not include a provision requiring armies to accept the surrender of enemy soldiers. While it did prohibit killing or wounding a prisoner who had surrendered by laying down his arms (Article XXIII(c)), or the giving of an order that no quarter would be given (Article XXIII(d)), none of its provisions were enforceable, especially in the aftermath of combat.²

The act of surrendering was not simple, or without danger. Until the moment of capture, the fighting man's task or his wounds kept him occupied. It was generally a traumatic moment for an individual when the fighting stopped: there had to be an understanding that surrender should be offered, and that offer had then to be accepted by the other side. This 'dangerous business' had to be completed in the 'fleeting' opportunities provided. Much depended on the circumstances of battle and on the individuals involved, for there were dilemmas on both sides.³

Captors could accept offers of surrender, sending men back to POW camps as:
sources of intelligence, at least in the short term;
sources of labour;
hostages, or

¹ Niall Ferguson: 'Prisoner Taking and Prisoner Killing in the Age of Total War: Towards a Political Economy of Military Defeat', *War in History*, Vol 11, No 4, April 2004, p 152.

² Gerald F Linderman: 'The World within War: America's Combat Experience in World War II' (The Free Press, New York, 1997), p 108. Ferguson, p 152.

³ AJ Barker: 'Prisoners of War' (BT Batsford, London, 1974), p 29. Richard Holmes: 'Firing Line' (Penguin, 1987), p 381. RJH Noble: 'Raising the White Flag: The Surrender of Australian Soldiers in France during the Great War'. Unpublished BA (Hons) Thesis, University College, ADFA, UNSW, 1988, pp 93, 94.

less likely, examples to their comrades.⁴

A supposed surrender could be a bluff and, even if it was accepted, it could be difficult to move prisoners back through the lines. Difficulties increased if there were wounded to be moved. In some circumstances, it might be easier for captors to shoot would-be prisoners, even at the risk of stiffening enemy resistance.⁵

Those that wished to surrender faced the dilemma that while they genuinely wanted to stop fighting, because they were incapacitated by wounds or out of ammunition and surrounded, they might still be killed by a vengeful or callous enemy.

With reference to surrendering in France in 1940, it has been suggested that accepting it as a sensible option for otherwise unwounded, well-led men did not mean that it was particularly honourable: most men felt humiliated by the experience. A man referred to his decision to surrender at that time as 'horrible'.⁶

First World War armies could punish men for surrendering. Australian Military Orders and Regulations (AMR&O) provided that an officer or soldier who 'in the presence of the enemy displays a white flag or other symbol in anticipation or in token of surrender' should be tried by a general court-martial.⁷

The AIF experience

The Official History (OH) included material on the capture of members of the AIF using AWM 30 Statements, usually without specifying that source.⁸

Noble stated that, in all the actions where large numbers of the AIF were captured, 'significant elements' were demoralised. Especially at Fromelles and Bullecourt, men from different units were inter-mingled and this made it hard for officers and NCOs to lead. Although some men fought on in difficult situations, most others attempted to return to their lines but, in doing this, they were often wounded and captured.⁹

⁴ Ferguson, p 153. As he noted, proper treatment of prisoners could be valuable if a victors' situation changed later. These categories excluded the wounded and officers: under Article VI of the Annex to The Hague Convention, they did not have to work. See Chapter 5 for Germany's need for labour.

⁵ Ferguson, p 154; Joanna Bourke: 'An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare' (Granta, London, 1999), p 189.

⁶ Mark Connelly and Walter Miller: 'The BEF and the Issue of Surrender on the Western Front in 1940', *War in History*, Vol 11, No 4, November 2004, pp 437, 436.

⁷ AMR&O 511(2).

⁸ For consistency, 'capture' has been interpreted as lasting from when a soldier was wounded and/or isolated from his unit until he reached a camp or hospital in Germany. Those on working parties behind the lines will be mentioned where their experiences were relevant: in this chapter or in Chapter 5.

⁹ Noble, pp 82, 84.

Others attempted to surrender, often seeking direction from surviving officers and, at Fromelles, Bullecourt and Dernancourt, orders were given after discussion between some groups of officers and men. Thus, at Fromelles: completely surrounded and ‘under advice from’ a lieutenant, men ‘were obliged to surrender’; and at Bullecourt: with ‘the consent of Lt Messingham (*sic*) and with the approval of the men we surrendered’ At Pozieres and Mouquet Farm (July to September 1916) and around Ypres in October 1917, soldiers seem to have been in such small groups that officers were not generally involved in these decisions.¹⁰

Casualties seem to have been crucial in decisions to surrender. When junior officers were removed and ORs were confronted by the enemy in force, often there seemed to be no alternative. Where surviving officers decided on surrender, soldiers could justify their actions as obeying orders. Officers were criticised when men felt they had been let down, or when behaviour had been inappropriate.¹¹

The white flag was used by the AIF at Fromelles and Bullecourt. Although it is not possible to be certain about all aspects of one of these instances, it illustrated some of the complexities of surrendering.¹²

The orders ‘every man for himself’ and ‘sauve qui peut’ were given at Bullecourt, and ‘practically’ all those that received it attempted to return. Many of those wounded there and at Fromelles were trying to return to their lines.¹³

Once their surrender had been accepted, prisoners were likely to be well treated by front line troops, even if searches were thorough and thefts of private property common. From what he had seen and heard, one Australian captured at Fromelles ‘fully expected’ to be killed or worked to death behind the lines. Although this could be delayed, wounds were dressed; if it was available, food could be provided. Benign treatment was not invariable, and it was likely to worsen as prisoners moved further behind the Front Line. Interrogations could be severe, and tricks were used in attempts to obtain information.¹⁴

After Fromelles, some unwounded Australians were taken to Lille and confined in an old fort, perhaps while decisions were made about their next move. After Bullecourt, they were held there as prisoners of respite (POR) for the alleged

¹⁰ *ibid*, pp 86-88. AWM 30: B16.17, Pte EJ Walker, 5th MG Bn; B13.18, 2/Lt J Ingram, 15th Bn.

¹¹ Noble, pp 90-91, 93. Wounds made it impossible for some to escape, but many of the AIF captured at Fromelles and Bullecourt were unwounded.

¹² OH, Vol III, p 436: Vol IV, p 332. The Fromelles incident was not in the Index to Volume III.

¹³ OH, Vol IV, p 334, fn 162, and p 335.

¹⁴ Holmes, p 382; Pte WP Choat (32nd Bn): Mitchell Library Mss 1504, p 2.

poor treatment of German POWs by the Allies. Conditions were harsh but, for many, probably not as bad as the working parties behind the lines to which they were then sent. Many did not reach camps in Germany for months. Late in the war, some men remained in working parties and retreated with the Germans.¹⁵

Treatment of the wounded

In some cases, even an incapacitating wound was not a guarantee of protection. Thus, at Mouquet Farm in August 1916, a corporal with a fractured pelvis, a wound in the hip, and a paralysed leg was threatened with a bayonet. At Fromelles, a German was stopped by his sergeant from throwing a grenade at an Australian wounded in the knee.¹⁶

Once they were aware that men were wounded, most Germans restrained themselves and accepted surrenders. At Bullecourt, a German officer saw L/Cpl PA Burge (14th Bn) in a shell hole a few yards from the enemy parapet. He drew his revolver, changed his mind and dragged Burge into the first trench. In the same battle, when the Germans were told that a dugout contained only wounded men, bombing stopped.¹⁷

Especially at Fromelles and Bullecourt, the Germans captured many wounded Australians; it was not surprising that they could not all be treated immediately.

Some accounts from Bullecourt were graphic. Australian machine gun and artillery fire ceased about 2pm on 11 April and a party of about 50 from 52nd Bn joined those already recovering the wounded. At first, they were fired on but, about 4pm, firing ceased and for the next couple of hours there was an informal truce. The Germans carried most of the wounded from the wire to their trenches. In some cases, they placed badly wounded beyond the outer edge of the wire, to be picked up by the AIF. When snow began to fall, both sides withdrew.¹⁸

Captured Australians were made to move the dead from trenches into shell holes, after all valuables were removed from the bodies. The wounded were also moved from the German wire, but a 15th Bn lance-corporal stated that those with leg wounds who could not walk were shot through the head. With the stretcher bearers,

¹⁵ Some, such as Pte R Russell (48th Bn; AWM 30: B10.13), did not go to Germany: see Chapter 5.

¹⁶ AWM 30: B 5.34, Cpl PJ Durham, 10th Bn; B16.4, Pte W Gillingham, 30th Bn.

¹⁷ Burge was wounded badly in both legs: AWM 30, B13.11. See Pte G Vowles, 15th Bn: AWM 30: B13.18.

¹⁸ OH, Vol IV, p 341.

‘in a blinding snow storm’, he had helped to move the wounded to the Germans’ second line.¹⁹

While waiting to be moved, a sergeant with a broken leg was wounded again in the left thigh and hand. Three nights later, he was carried to a large dugout in the rear; all his clothes and possessions were taken and he was wrapped in blanket. The Germans told him that he ought to have been shot: ‘our boys do not take prisoners’. Although he could not vouch for the accuracy of that statement, he was also told that, while Germans ‘shot from the waist down’, Australians aimed from the waist up.²⁰

Unsurprisingly, there were variations in the treatment from individuals and groups of Germans. A man from 48th Bn saw a large number of AIF wounded: ‘the Germans handled them brutally.’ Another from 16th Bn, wounded in the left hip and both legs, was carried back to a dressing station in a sheet hanging from pole. He was searched and, while his wallet and some letters were taken, he stated that the Germans ‘did not treat the Australian wounded at all badly.’²¹

Another from 48th Bn, wounded in the left knee, right arm and hand, was one of about a dozen men left behind when his unit retired. A German sergeant asked in French if everyone in the group was wounded. Assured that this was so, he smiled and returned later with ‘a couple of comrades’. After the group was mustered, those that could not walk were taken to a nearby village.²²

At the end of fighting at Bullecourt, many Australian wounded lay about the German wire until they were captured or, as Bean put it, ‘put to death by a merciful enemy’. Later, in their wire, the Germans ‘shot some of those who were evidently hurt too badly for recovery.’ Butler supported this view: the Official Historian had ‘properly’ stated that these were the actions of such an enemy.²³

When a stretcher bearer was captured at Passchendaele, his team was called on in English to come into the German trench. He saw a badly wounded man from 48th

¹⁹ AWM 30: B13.18, L/Cpl FAWC Peachey. He had been slightly wounded.

²⁰ AWM 30: B13.18, Sgt JS Tomlinson, 15th Bn. Cull was told that German doctors took ‘every opportunity of amputating’ when ‘your men’ were wounded in the legs: see W Ambrose Cull: ‘At All Costs’ (Australasian Authors’ Agency, Melbourne, 1919), p 96.

²¹ AWM 30: B10.13, Pte R Russell, 48th Bn; B13.22, Pte CH Bunter, 16th Bn.

²² AWM 30: B10.13, Pte J Hill.

²³ OH, Vol IV, p 340 and fn 185; AG Butler (ed): ‘The Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914-1918’, three volumes (Australian War Memorial, Canberra). Hereafter, eg. ‘OH M, Vol III’. See the Bibliography for a full citation. Vol II, p 135. Pte J Lee (14th Bn) stated that this was done by German medical personnel who carried revolvers (AWM 30: B 13.5). See also L/Cpl Peachey’s account above, used without attribution in Jonathan Walker: ‘The Blood Tub: General Gough and the Battle of Bullecourt, 1917’ (Spellmount, Staplehurst, 2000), p 104.

Bn and they carried him in turn on their backs to a dressing station. He thought that the Germans 'seemed to be doing their best to remove our wounded and to treat them humanely.' He saw no infractions of the laws of war, and German Red Cross stretcher bearers carried wounded on their backs for nearly half a mile.²⁴

Cull's story

While other men had different experiences, Capt WA Cull (22nd Bn) told his story as a seriously wounded man unable to continue fighting. He was caught up in the German wire when he was captured in February 1917. After he was freed, his watch was taken and his pockets emptied. His compass was also taken as a souvenir and his Sam Browne belt was tossed away; his riding boots were taken later.²⁵

In the wire, Cull had heard men groaning to his left. Later, while he could hear wounded calling out from the other side, there was silence. He thought that the Germans might have killed them. Sometime afterwards, he 'knew that I owed them no apology for that suspicion.' He could not forget 'the strange way' in which his men had ceased to groan, 'impossible and horrible as the sinister suggestion seemed'. In hospital later, Cull was in the bed next to another severely wounded AIF officer who, before he died, said that he 'had actually seen the Huns killing the wounded with the butts of their rifles.'²⁶

Just before he was moved to another hospital, Cull was asked whether he had expected to be killed. He replied that the Allies treated German wounded well and the same thing was expected from 'any honourable enemy'.²⁷

An inquisitive sergeant-major visited him on a number of occasions. In a mixture of English and French, he attempted to gain Cull's confidence before seeking information. When he would not answer the question to which all the German's efforts had been directed, the visits stopped.²⁸

At Karlsruhe, before he went to the camp, Cull stayed in a hotel overnight. He was shown to a small room 'specially fitted for two occupants': they 'were certain to talk' and a 'quiet listener outside the door might hear something to his advantage.'

²⁴ AWM 30: B10.7, Pte JF McIntosh, 47th Bn.

²⁵ Cull, pp 84, 87-89. See also his Statement at AWM 30: B17.6.

²⁶ Cull, pp 87, 90, 93.

²⁷ *ibid*, p 94.

²⁸ *ibid*, pp 95-96, 99-100, 101. Among other things, the German was interested to know why Australia was fighting Germany. This issue was raised with many AIF and Canadian POWs, especially the Australians captured in 1916.

When Cull spoke to the Russian orderly who brought coffee for breakfast, a sentry hustled the man out. Next time the Russian came, he warned Cull to silence.²⁹

Avoiding capture

Attempts to avoid capture and return to the Australian lines were not always successful and, in some cases, capture was not the only result. Wounded in the thigh and legs in November 1916, a man crawled around No-Man's Land for seven days eating the rations of the dead. He was under the German wire when he was brought in; both his legs were subsequently amputated.³⁰

At Bullecourt, another Australian was ordered to try and make his way back to the Australian lines. He and a corporal lived in shell holes for five days before being captured with frost-bitten feet.³¹

Others seem to have survived between the lines for a few days largely unscathed. When he was captured in August 1916, one soldier was 'feeling very worn out': he had had no food or water for five days and was not sorry to be seen and taken into the German lines.³²

The Germans did not always search newly-captured men. In November 1917, with two other Australians Pte L Gosewinckel (5th Bn) doubled back between the enemy's outposts and his trench and hid in shell holes for three days and nights, trying to crawl back to the AIF lines. They were almost frozen and unable to help themselves when a German party found them. Carried back to a trench, they were given coffee and taken behind the line where they were interrogated: they said nothing. While all their belongings had been taken from them before the 'stunt', they were surprised that they were not searched.³³

Misadventure

Capture by misadventure of one sort or another seems to have been quite common. In particular, attacks at night or passage through blasted, featureless landscapes could easily lead to capture; sometimes obstinacy was the cause.

²⁹ *ibid*, pp 142-143. He seems to have been in the room by himself.

³⁰ AWM 30: B6.8(2), Pte J McMillan, 19th Bn. His hands were also frost-bitten: see RC W 1960305.

³¹ AWM 30: B10.10, Pte N Lally, 47th Bn..

³² AWM 30: B6.16(1), Pte RE Membrey, 21st Bn.

³³ AWM 30: B5.14. Gosewinckel was one of 14 identifiable German-Australians in the Sample. See John F Williams: 'German Anzacs and the First World War' (UNSW Press, Sydney, 2003), p 147.

L/Cpl E Gaunt (13th Fd Amb) was in charge of 15 AAMC stretcher bearers in August 1916 when he lost his way and wandered into enemy lines. The group was accompanied by five 48th Bn men, detailed as emergency stretcher bearers. One of the latter was certain that, although the AAMC men blamed the 48th Bn men for the capture, this was not so. In his Statement, he was to state twice that Gaunt ‘wouldn’t have it’ that the group had crossed ‘our front line’. After their status was established under the Geneva Convention, the AAMC men were exchanged, arriving in the UK on 22 February 1918. The other men were held for the rest of the war: their resentment was understandable.³⁴

While inspecting roads for craters and shell holes in March 1917, L/Cpl (later 2/Lt) F Broomfield (7th Fd Coy Engrs) was let down by his eyesight: during this ‘lonely search’, he and a sapper ‘practically walked’ into an enemy outpost.³⁵

The unit’s history supplemented their Statements, noting that they were ‘cycling’ when captured. Broomfield was then a ‘most ardent’ NCO but was ‘afflicted with extremely poor sight’. His glasses were ‘obviously not strong enough’, as he had to ‘sort of peer about’ and had failed to see that he was passing beyond the outposts. The sapper, a very recent reinforcement, was naturally guided by his NCO ‘who, in fact, really needed a guide’.³⁶

Late in March 1918, two men from the AIF railway operating detachment were not armed when, deep into the German lines, their train was surrounded by ‘thousands of Germans’. The sergeant was ordered at pistol point to work the engine and said that this German was ‘not a friend’ and would just as soon have blown his brains out at end of the trip. While he could not blow up the engine with gun cotton, he knew that two cylinders were cracked, making the engine useless for the Germans. This seemed to be a matter of some satisfaction.³⁷

The more fluid fighting after 8 August 1918 was responsible for two officers wandering into the German lines. While Gosewinckel’s party had not been searched, one of these officers reported a different situation.

³⁴ AWM 30: B11.10/17. Bean said that there were 14 AAMC men: OH, Vol III, p 839, fn 88. AWM 30: B10.11, Pte GW Anderson, 48th Bn. Article IX of the Convention refers: see the Introduction.

³⁵ AWM 30: B6.16(2). The unit history gave ‘about 23 March’ in front of Vaultx as the date and place of capture. Broomfield had been recommended for a commission, and was carrying out an officer’s duties at the time of his capture. When his status was recognised, he was sent to an officers’ camp.

³⁶ RH Chatto: ‘The Seventh Company (Field Engineers) AIF, 1915-1918’ (Smith’s Newspapers Ltd, Sydney, 1936), pp 57-58.

³⁷ AWM 30: B6.14(2), Sgt F Hawken and Spr JE Hughes See OH, Vol V, p 246, fn 10 for this incident.

Following a conference of company commanders at Mont St Quentin in August 1918, an officer from a machine gun unit was returning to his section when he stepped off the road into broken ground and walked into a German patrol. He was taken in turn to battalion and brigade HQs where he was 'examined'. Soon after capture, he was robbed of his trench coat, boots, puttees, revolver, compass, etc; some private letters were also taken, but he managed to dispose of the marked map he was carrying. When he was again examined more private property was taken, including four sovereigns for which he was given 60 marks.³⁸

Even battalion commanders could get lost. At Vendellee on 17 September 1918, LtCol TR Marsden (5th MG Bn) went through the Front Line 'to select fresh battery positions'. He was seized from behind by two Germans and covered by six others. Within a few minutes, he was taken to a company headquarters where he was examined for about two hours. At a regimental HQ, he was cross-examined and then knocked out during an attempt to escape. German intelligence staff visited him on each of the four days he was in hospital near Cambrai.³⁹

Surrounded

Many men stated that they were surrounded and, with no means of carrying on the fight, had to surrender. This seemed to have been the case for the unwounded, particularly at Bullecourt but, for example, it also applied at Passchendaele where the conditions of the battlefield played a part. A unit's flanks were exposed when there was a heavy frontal attack with 'hot' machine gun fire, so that a 40th Bn party could not raise their heads. The Germans were behind them and, as their rifles were clogged with mud and quite useless, they 'had to surrender'.⁴⁰

Use of the white flag

Words ascribed to a 15th Bn captain demonstrated some of the problems of surrendering: 'It hurts old man but you'll have to fly the white flag.'⁴¹

Waving a white flag, or something that looked like one, throwing equipment and weapons away and raising hands above the head were the usual ways of indicating a wish to surrender. Pretending to surrender, then pulling out and using a

³⁸ AWM 30: B6.5. 2/Lt WAC Carne was the only POW from 6th MG Coy (2nd MG Bn).

³⁹ AWM 30: B16.15. He was the most senior AIF officer to be captured. See OH, Vol VI, p 897, fn 48.

⁴⁰ AWM 30: B7.8, Pte WJ Emmerton.

⁴¹ Capt D Dunworth (15th Bn) to Sig WF Parker (14th Bn) at Bullecourt (AWM 30: B13.11).

weapon, could cause a massacre; Bean gave two examples from September 1917 and another from May 1918. It was 'hardly surprising that during or immediately after intense fighting' requests to surrender 'often' went unheeded. There were stories of fake surrenders, where the gullible were shot down after responding to 'a disingenuous white flag or cry of "Kamerad"''.⁴²

During the First World War, according to Holmes, the soldier who fought until the enemy was at close range had only a 50 per cent chance of survival. The captors' inclination not to take risks was reinforced by stories about misuse of the white flag. In spite of such stories, it seems that misunderstandings were more common than stratagems and feigned surrenders.⁴³

There are a number of references to use of white flags in the OH; several Statements showed that wounded or isolated groups of men used it, but there were different views about it. When Capt HW Murray VC (13th Bn) saw a white signal flag raised behind him at Bullecourt, probably at the end of the retreat, he ordered it to be shot down.⁴⁴

An incident at Fromelles

The dilemmas involved in surrendering are well illustrated by an incident during the battle of Fromelles, on 19/20 July 1916. These dilemmas were alluded to at the end of the OH's account of this 'ill-starred action':

Captain Ranson, the senior officer remaining, upon endeavouring to find a way back, had been hit. As the men, possessing no means of defence were simply being killed off by the advancing bombers, a white flag had been raised, and this party surrendered.⁴⁵

While Bean dealt with it in less than six lines, Statements from men in a number of 5th Div units referred to this incident and gave more information. It is also informative on aspects of the relationship of officers and men in the AIF.

⁴² Barker, p 35. CEW Bean (ed): "The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918", 12 vols, various authors, (Angus & Robertson Ltd, Sydney, 1921 to 1942). Hereafter eg. 'OH, Vol III'. Vol IV, pp 771-772, fn 115; Vol VI, pp 133-135. Other examples of killing after surrender, by both sides, can be found in each of the OH volumes dealing with the Western Front. See also Bill Gammage: 'The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War' (Penguin, 1975), pp 257-259. Ferguson, pp 154, 158.

⁴³ Holmes, pp 382, 383.

⁴⁴ For use of the white flag by the AIF, see OH: Vol III, p 819, fn 39; Vol IV, p 332; Vol V, p 492; Vol VI, p 362. Bean pointed out that the white flag was often used 'improperly' in place of Red Cross flags to cover the work of stretcher bearers. For Murray, see OH, Vol IV, p 332.

⁴⁵ OH, Vol III, pp 435, 436. See Chapter 1 for a brief account of this battle and the AIF's casualties.

Under Capt JJ Murray, Capt FR Ranson was second-in-command, B Coy, 53rd Bn. He completed two Statements: on 25 November 1918, he noted that he had been wounded in the right arm during the German counter-attack. Two weeks later, he did not mention his capture; this document seems incoherent and it omitted some significant matters.⁴⁶

The first Statement noted that he had already forwarded 'a Confidential Statement concerning my Capture and Captivity' to AIF HQ, London. His Red Cross file included information from other men that suggested his party had advanced too far, and then had to retire for lack of support.⁴⁷

After Lt AW Bowman (D Coy, 53rd Bn) was hit on the helmet by a shell, he was unconscious for two hours. When he recovered, he joined a small band of his battalion but, by this time, 'things had gone so far as to make further resistance from where we were impossible.' His Statement also drew attention to heavy casualties.

According to L/Sgt AL Harrison, just after day-break, a white flag was hoisted to his right and an order to surrender was received. He thought it came from Bowman, but added that when it came 'our position was hopeless, in my opinion.'

In two Statements, Cpl MJD Austin (55th Bn) was clear Bowman had given the order: he had 'decided that our position was hopeless and told us to surrender.'⁴⁸

In his first Statement, dated 17 October 1918, Pte CA Mitchell said that Bowman not only gave the order but surrendered himself. Two German soldiers escorting Bowman away were then shot, and 'our fellows' also threatened to shoot him. Cpls Kiss and Horne (54th Bn) confirmed this in Germany later but, in another Statement dated 13 December, Mitchell did not mention the threat to shoot Bowman. Horne stated that Bowman said that he had orders from Murray to surrender, and then ordered Horne's party to do so.⁴⁹

Mitchell said that he did not see Murray 'at all during the engagement', but heard in Germany that 'it was really through this officer that the white flag was flown by our fellows.' All those involved gave written statements about the incident to Capt RA Keay (32nd Bn) in Holland later in the war. In a second Statement, Mitchell stated

⁴⁶ AWM 30: B14.1. What follows will be largely from Statements from that source; no additional reference will be given, unless a man was from another unit. Capt JJ Murray, 53rd Bn, should not be confused with Capt HW Murray VC DCM, 13th Bn.

⁴⁷ RC W 2240603. It has not been possible to find this report.

⁴⁸ AWM 30: B14.6.

⁴⁹ AWM 30: B14.5. Horne confirmed the shooting of the Germans guarding Bowman. Without naming Bowman, Bean referred to this incident: OH, Vol III, p 436, fn 120.

that, about 6am: 'Lt Bowman came over to us and told us to surrender – that it was no use fighting on, as we were surrounded.'⁵⁰

L/Cpl DP Stanton was beside Bowman all night and he made no mention of the alleged order. A group of 55th Bn men believed that Bowman, who had joined them during the night, gave it.⁵¹

Cpl RJ Breen was specific: Murray disappeared after giving the order to surrender. Pte FW Nichols agreed: realising the position was hopeless, Murray gave the instruction to surrender, a view with which Pte JC Elliott (5th MG Bn) agreed. Whatever can be drawn from this, another man did not see Murray after midnight.⁵²

According to Pte WJ James (55th Bn): 'Capt Murray of the 53rd Battalion gave the order to surrender.' Pte FG Harrison (55th Bn) was also specific. By about daybreak on 20 July, the Germans were on the AIF flank and Murray gave that order. 'About 60 gave themselves up on my right. The men that were with me did not give up for 3 hours after word came down the trench to retire in single file.'⁵³

Pte PJ Gill saw Ranson with the white flag raised; later he 'found out' that Ranson had ordered the surrender, and Ptes AB Rankin and J Ryan agreed. More discreetly, Cpl JE Morris said 'I believe Capt Ranson was there when we retired'.

Ranson was young and may already have been rejected by 20th Bn; he seems to have been in a larger number of camps than most other officers. It is surprising that he did not mention his involvement in an attempted escape.⁵⁴

In his inquiry into Fromelles, Corfield quoted Bean. About 7am on 20 July, Murray, after seeing an AIF group being taken away as POWs, 'made his way' to LtCol WEH Cass (CO 54th Bn) and 'represented that the troops in his sector were gradually being faced with a situation in which they could only die or surrender.'⁵⁵

Corfield also used material from Maj RO Cowey (2i/c, 55th Bn) in Bean's files. Cowey stated that he had 'flourished his revolver' at Murray, endeavouring to make him realise that he was more ferocious than any German. He had intended to

⁵⁰ Keay's Statement (AWM 30: B16.11) did not mention the matter. It has not been possible to identify any such report. Robin S Corfield: 'Don't forget me, cobber: The Battle of Fromelles, 19/20 July 1916 – An Inquiry' (Corfield and Company, Rosanna, Vic, 2000), p 310.

⁵¹ AWM 30: B14.7; B11.3.

⁵² AWM 30: B16.17, Pte WW Crozier, 53rd Bn.

⁵³ AWM 30: B14.6. Noble quoted Harrison's Statement at pp 87 and 89.

⁵⁴ According to Lt VA Norvill (2 Sqn AFC; AWM 30: B3.10), Lt 'Ransom' AIF was one of 17 officers involved in an unsuccessful escape. Just after it, he was 'doing punishment' for a month at a camp for ORs.

⁵⁵ Corfield, p 146, quoting OH, Vol III, p 432.

arrest Murray, to prevent 'disaffection' in the firing line, but thought that his nerve had gone and that bullying him would save 'the court martial business.' Later, he was 'astonished' to see that Murray had received the MC for Fromelles.⁵⁶

Cass' original after-action report stated that 53rd Bn had broken and that many of the men were 'demoralised and a mixed party had surrendered'. He had been informed that four officers had surrendered, although 'in the half light there may be some mistake about this.' His report was withdrawn and re-written by order of the GOC 5th Div because it contained 'mistaken' statements and 'unfounded charges'.⁵⁷

Later in his first Statement, Mitchell appeared to qualify his view: while Bowman had told his party to surrender, Murray was behind that action. This is consistent with other Statements, particularly from men of the 54th and 55th Bns. The words in the OH about Murray's visit to Cass, the white flag and Ranson's capture were all particularly careful. Because it was contrary to his characterisation of the AIF, this was not an incident about which Bean would have wanted to write: hence its brevity.⁵⁸

Some Statements were frank about officers' failings during this incident. Pte Harrison's comment showed that not all those captured agreed with the order to surrender. One man did not see any of his 29th Bn officers during the battle. Noble saw Mitchell's first version of the surrender of 53rd Bn men as a clear example of 'a face to face encounter' between officers and men that 'not the sort of event likely to be recorded' in official statements. It was not mentioned by Bowman or Kiss, and Noble suggested that such incidents probably occurred during other actions.⁵⁹

As far as one soldier could see, at Fromelles no officers were under the influence of liquor but, at Bullecourt, a man saw a 14th Bn officer who was drunk.⁶⁰

Apart from Bullecourt, more of the AIF were captured at Fromelles than in any other Australian action on the Western Front. It revealed that there can be many different versions of the same event. Perhaps more importantly, it was an example of Bean doing his best to protect the image of the AIF that he was creating.

⁵⁶ Corfield, p 368: Cowey's correspondence with Bean in 1926. OH Vol III was published in 1929.

⁵⁷ Cass' report of 21 July 1916 and the GOC's statement: AWM 26, Box 34, Item 6. Ranson and Bowman were the only 53rd Bn officers captured.

⁵⁸ Alistair Thomson: "'Steadfast until death?' CEW Bean and the Representation of Australian Military Manhood', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol 23, No 93, October 1989, p 465.

⁵⁹ Pte FG Harrison, 55th Bn AWM 30: B14.6; B16.1, Pte S Martin; Noble, p 89.

⁶⁰ AWM 30: B14.1, Pte S Emerton, 53rd Bn; B13.22, Pte W Smith, 16th Bn.

Attitudes to officers

A number of Statements commented on the presence, or otherwise, of officers during action. A sergeant captured at Bois Grenier in May 1916 stated that there were no officers with his platoon and he saw no officers during the engagement. A 21st Bn corporal, captured at Mouquet Farm in August 1916, did not see his company commander; the lieutenant in charge of his party 'also failed to show up'.⁶¹

At Passchendaele in October 1917, an officer asked if there was plenty of ammunition before 'clearing out' as quickly as he could.⁶²

While there was criticism of officers, there was also approval. Although he had only with the unit for a short time when he was captured at Bullecourt, Lt R Morris (48th Bn) was 'quite a boy'; another officer was said to be 'a game lad'.⁶³

After surrender

There was harsh treatment, even murder, after some men surrendered: at Fromelles and Mouquet Farm, men were shot 'without any justification'. At Fromelles:

Many of those left in the German trenches were never seen again. Some men are said to have been shot after surrender, but on the whole the treatment after surrender seems to have been fair.⁶⁴

The 5th Div history stated that, on the morning of 20 July 1916, a soldier who became a POW saw an unarmed and wounded Australian approach a party of German stretcher bearers to get assistance for a more seriously wounded comrade. The unarmed man was shot through the head. Pte AT Nelligan (32nd Bn) could have been the source for this story.⁶⁵

Those who died in German custody after Pozieres included Pte NG Sainsbury (28th Bn). After he was wounded, he was taken into enemy lines where a German officer asked if he was the machine gunner. When this was confirmed, Sainsbury was

⁶¹ AWM 30: B6.14(1), Sgt PJ O'Shea, 20th Bn; B6.16(1), Cpl CR Luth, 21st Bn. The battalion's bombing officer was captured with O'Shea. Pte J Corrall stated that Capt Sale (B Coy, 21st Bn) led his men. Luth named the other officer. A number of men stated that they did not see any officers during combat.

⁶² AWM 30: B10.7, Pte WP Seward, 48th Bn.

⁶³ RC W: 1830210, 1840209. In April 1917, Capt JE Mott (48th Bn) was over 40 years old.

⁶⁴ AWM 30: B16.11, Pte AD Stone, 32nd Bn; B16.1, Pte TD Bolton, 29th Bn; B11.3, Ptes RW Rees and JF Townsend, 51st Bn. OH, Vol III, p 437, fn 121.

⁶⁵ AD Ellis: 'The Story of the Fifth Australian Division' (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1920), p 115; AWM 30: B16.11.

shot through the heart and the head, the officer was reported as saying: 'This is the way I deal with English swine.'⁶⁶

Others recorded varying degrees of harsh treatment by the Germans at Dernancourt on 5 April 1918. A 47th Bn man saw Pte Curtis of his unit shot. Seven survivors in part of the support trench had surrendered 'after a very hard fight'. A German officer asked who they were and, when Curtis identified his group, the officer shot him in the stomach and told the group to carry him to the rear, where he died.⁶⁷

Another man from the same unit, wounded in the elbows, asked for a drink and was punched in the face, breaking his false teeth. After five hours in a shell hole, a captain was taken to a dressing station for treatment of a slight wound and gas inhalation: 'instructed' to carry wounded Australians back, he was too exhausted to do so. Taken to a headquarters, he was cross-examined, 'but would not speak'. Later, a German artillery officer spoke to him 'and said the war was over and I replied. He struck me across the face with his riding whip and rode on.'⁶⁸

Some men had no complaints about their treatment. An 11th Bn lance-corporal, captured unwounded at Lagnicourt in April 1917, was taken to a German headquarters and photographed several times. He was asked why he had come to the war; his reply, that he had seen it as his duty, was told that it served him right that now he was a POW.⁶⁹

Interrogation

Referring to interrogations, the Annex to The Hague Convention provided that:

Every prisoner of war is bound to give, if he is questioned on the subject, his true name and rank, and if he infringes this rule, he is liable to have the advantages given to prisoners of his class curtailed.⁷⁰

While some of the belligerents had not ratified this Convention, almost all the nations involved accepted that it represented a declaration of international law. While

⁶⁶ AWM 30: B6.9(2), Sgt GAH Bruce-Drayton, 28th Bn. See Neville Browning: 'The Blue and White Diamond: The History of the 28th Battalion 1915-1919' (Advance Press, Perth, 2002), p 170. Quoting an 'eyewitness report', this account was not as detailed as Bruce-Drayton's.

⁶⁷ AWM 30: B10.5, Pte JA O'Rourke. See OH, Vol V, pp 396-397, fn 67, for the use of this and the next two incidents.

⁶⁸ AWM 30: B10.5, Pte V Savage and Capt AH Fraser, 52nd Bn.

⁶⁹ L/Cpl CH Ingle: State Library of Victoria, MS 10337.

⁷⁰ Article IX.

it was ‘generally’ observed, extraction of information under certain conditions was ‘permissible’. This gave scope to the unscrupulous and, as the war progressed, ideas changed: the use of ‘stool pigeons’ and planting microphones were accepted tools.⁷¹

In September 1916, HQ 5th Div warned all ranks ‘that they are betraying their duty by giving any information other than their name and rank if they should fall into the hands of the enemy.’⁷²

Collection of information and results

Some men were surprised by how much the Germans knew about the AIF, if not about Australia’s strong links with Great Britain and the Empire. Gaunt was interrogated in detail by a senior German officer who particularly wanted to know whether the party had been carrying ammunition to the firing line. He also inquired about the unit’s service at Gallipoli, and the reason for Gaunt’s enlistment (‘I am a Britisher’). Gaunt stressed the German’s inability to understand why the AIF was fighting as, according to the officer, Australia had no grievances against Germany. During the questioning, the officer ‘did not appear to be abrupt or at all unfriendly.’⁷³

A captain was questioned at a dressing station and found that the Germans held accurate information about the AIF. They were delighted to have captured so many of 4th Bde: they had been aware of its movements for months and ‘feared us most of any unit in France.’ He was told that it was a ‘pity’ that the AIF had retired on 10 April: the German line was lightly held then, expecting an attack later.⁷⁴

When a party of stretcher bearers was taken to a divisional HQ at Passchendaele, a German officer recognised the unit’s colours ‘and seemed to know as much about us as we did ourselves.’⁷⁵

Few Canadians described brutal or systematic interrogations, but the Germans were sometimes well-informed about command at the battalion level.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Barker, pp 16, 60.

⁷² Quoted by Corfield, p 303. At p 140, fn 20, OH M, Vol II, noted that in March-April 1917, 5th Div medical schemes of training had included lectures and instruction on conduct as prisoners of war.

⁷³ AWM 30: B11.10. Canadian POWs were also asked they were in the war: see Desmond Morton: ‘Silent Battle: Canadian Prisoners of War in Germany, 1914-1919’ (Lester Publishing, Toronto, 1992), pp 14, 37, 43-44, 71.

⁷⁴ AWM 30: B13.5, Capt DP Wells (13th Bn).

⁷⁵ AWM 30: B10.7, Pte AM Falconer, 47th Bn. See Pte JF McIntosh above.

⁷⁶ Morton, pp 34-35, 36.

Extracting information

The Germans used a number of means to get information from their prisoners, including threats and rough treatment. A wounded man, captured at Mouquet Farm in August 1916, was left in a dugout for three days without attention. 'Carefully questioned', he pretended to be deaf and was then given some 'rough handling'.⁷⁷

Another soldier, wounded at the second battle of Bullecourt, was taken to a big dugout and questioned: two soldiers were detailed to shoot him if he gave 'no particulars'.⁷⁸

At Passchendaele, a captain was questioned by a German intelligence officer: 'if I expected to receive fair treatment I should answer his questions in a civil manner. I refused to give him any information.'⁷⁹

A corporal from 30th Bn got lost and 'sought information' at an enemy outpost in April 1918. He passed through several German headquarters and, although given no food for three days, refused to give any information. While he was not specific, 'various ways' were used to induce him to give the location of his brigade's HQ.⁸⁰

It is more difficult to understand what impelled the Germans at Altdamm at the end of 1917 or beginning of 1918. All the AIF there were put into 'strafe' barracks and put through the 'Third Degree'. Even those who had been POWs for 18 months were asked all sorts of questions by German officers. 'I don't know that they got any very valuable information.'⁸¹

Tricks

By April 1917, the Germans were using a form asking POWs for number, name, various military details up to Corps level; date of birth occupation, place of birth. As they were asked to complete these forms, it was intimated that it was required by the War Office. An officer saw this as 'a subtle endeavour' to entrap information from the credulous and unsuspecting, and thought some POWs may have been inveigled into filling out these 'specious forms'.⁸²

In at least one case, an obvious ruse was used to obtain information, with little success. When a party of soldiers was captured unwounded in October 1917, the

⁷⁷ AWM 30: B6.16(2), Pte DH Read, 21st Bn.

⁷⁸ AWM 30: B5.2, Pte D Rosser, 1st Bn.

⁷⁹ AWM 30: B10.7, Capt LA Whittington, 48th Bn.

⁸⁰ AWM 30: B16.6, A/Cpl TW Grosvenor, 30th Bn, attached to 8th Bde HQ.

⁸¹ AWM 30: B13.22, Pte FAFJ Webb, 16th Bn.

⁸² AWM 30: B13.11, Lt AJ McQuiggin, 14th Bn.

Germans 'treated us quite decently'. When they were questioned officers came in, dressed in British officers' uniforms, 'to try and get information out of the boys.' One in Flying Corps' uniform 'soon went out when he found the game was no use.' Another, in a Tommy's uniform, said that he was a New Zealand officer 'but anyone could see through him.'⁸³

An AFC officer, captured in February 1918, was put in a room with two Flying Corps officers for eight days. On the second day, they found two microphones hidden in the wall. They were also visited periodically by an anti-aircraft captain who tried to obtain 'all the information possible, but without success.' Another officer from his unit was captured on 4 November 1918. He refused to give information and was put in a room with a Canadian officer. He thought that there was a dictaphone 'connected with the room' and, after the Armistice, was able to confirm his suspicions.⁸⁴

Difficult situations

The newly captured sometimes found themselves in difficult situations. At Mouquet Farm, a lance-corporal was blown up by shell and knocked out. Dazed but unwounded, he lost his sense of direction and fell into a German outpost. Carrying only a revolver, he was taken for an officer and treated 'with great consideration'. He was disarmed and searched, but nothing was stolen. He believed that the revolver saved his life: the Germans were 'all very wild' and, had they known that he was not an officer, 'I don't think that I should have had much of a chance.'⁸⁵

A corporal from a machine gun battalion was also carrying a revolver at Ypres in October 1917 when he was intercepted by a German patrol. He was put in front of an 'assemblage of fully 20 officers', and given 'a rough over-hauling': it was alleged that his bullets were 'dum-dum' ammunition. Later, he was marched further back to another HQ, and again 'severely interrogated' about the ammunition.⁸⁶

Treatment of German-Australians

While German-Australians do not seem to have been badly treated, life was awkward for at least one. Pte FW Klingner (4th Pnr Bn) was separated from his unit,

⁸³ AWM 30: B10.7, Pte A Thompson, 48th Bn. 'Tommy' was a term for the British soldier.

⁸⁴ AWM 30: B3.12, Lts WB Randell and EJ Goodson (B3.13), 4 Sqn AFC

⁸⁵ AWM 30: B10.20, L/Cpl JW Pitts, 50th Bn.

⁸⁶ AWM 30: B6.18, Cpl LD Brooks, 2nd MG Bn.

partly buried by a shell and then ‘lied’ (*sic*) in water in a drain in April 1918. When the Germans advanced, his party was captured. He was given ‘a knock on the head with a rifle, Which (*sic*) just about killed me altogether’ and taken ‘separate’ from the rest of his party to be pushed down the stairs and questioned in a cellar. He was told that he would be shot for refusing to tell the Germans anything, at a time when he was feeling ‘the worst’ after being blown up and then lying in water for ten hours. He was sent to a dressing station, ‘now under different control’; because he was unwounded, he was fed and sent to work behind the lines before being sent to Germany.⁸⁷

Pte CH Wiese (48th Bn) was wounded at Bullecourt. Because of his parentage, the Germans had tried but would ‘get no information’ from him: Wiese was ‘a real good fella’.⁸⁸

Aftermath

Immediately after Fromelles, the prisoners were taken to Lille, marched through the suburbs and city to impress the French, and then interrogated. Keay was one that mentioned being ‘marched circuitously’ through Lille, guarded by Uhlands (cavalry), for the ‘public benefit’. A young girl who had ‘persistently waved’ her hand was made to march with the squad to Lille.⁸⁹

After Bullecourt, captured men were marched through Lille and sympathetic demonstrations from the populace were again ‘roughly handled’.⁹⁰

The wounded were sent to hospitals behind the lines for immediate treatment, for varying periods depending on the severity of their wounds, and then to hospitals in Germany. For a period in 1917, the unwounded were often retained in working parties close behind the lines, often under Allied shell fire, over-worked and under-fed. Those captured late in 1918 were likely to retreat with the German army.

⁸⁷ AWM30: B10.5 and PR 91/099. See also Williams, p 234, for use of Klingner’s account. The later account was more detailed than his Statement.

⁸⁸ AWM 30: B13.22, Pte FE Comery, 16th Bn. Comery was one of a number of men who alleged that, because of his parentage, Wiese was held in Germany when some of the less seriously wounded were released. Wiese remained in Germany until the Armistice. He did not provide a Statement.

⁸⁹ AWM 30: B16.11, Capt RA Keay, 32nd Bn; B14.5, Pte J Skea, 54th Bn.

⁹⁰ OH, Vol III, p 442, fn 138. See photos of Keay and Capt C Mills (31st Bn) in Corfield: pp 304, 326. OH, Vol IV, p 342, fn 189.

‘The Black Hole of Lille’ and later

After being marched through Lille, many of the unwounded ORs captured at both Fromelles and Bullecourt were sent to underground dungeons at a disused French fort, known to both groups as ‘the Black Hole of Lille’.

In July 1916, it seems to have been used as a collection centre for prisoners. Statements made it clear that the conditions there were not good, but they did not dwell on the matter. Five 54th Bn privates stated that they were taken to the fort ‘where we received inhuman treatment’ for three days. Another man from the same unit, however, was given black bread and coffee and a card to complete. It was received by his mother. A bugler spent three days there: ‘we were well fed.’⁹¹

In April 1917, the purpose of the stay for some 4th Div ORs was quite different. On 8 April 1917, the Germans had proclaimed that, unless the British Government withdrew all German POWs at least 30 kilometres behind the front line, they would carry out reprisals on Allied soldiers captured after that date. The proclamation of the conditions of treatment for the so-called prisoners of respite (POR) included a number of conditions: prisoners were to be kept:

very short of food, bad lodgings, no bed, hard work, also to be worked beside the German guns under British shell fire. No pay, no soap or water for washing, no razor for shaving, no towels, no boots or clothing will be issued to them.⁹²

Although many commented on their time in the fort, Sgt WC Groves (14th Bn) seems to have given the most detailed account. He did not complete a Statement, but made a number of broadcasts about his experiences in 1930. Between January 1932 and March 1934, this material, slightly expanded, was published in the official journal of the NSW Branch of the RSL.⁹³

Groups of up to 120 men were crammed into rectangular chambers 30 metres long by 10 metres wide. There was no furniture or bedding and the men slept on damp, mouldy flagstones. They were given little exercise and the food was bad and insufficient; according to one account, the daily ration per man was one slice of bread

⁹¹ AWM 30: B14.5, Pte C Gigg *et al*, 54th Bn; B14.6, Bugler WR Smith, 55th Bn.

⁹² ‘Reveille’, Vol 6, No 4, December 1932, p 56. See Vol 5, No 4, December 1931, p 10, for a version provided by former Pte Douglas Grant (13th Bn), issued at Douai in August 1917. An Indigenous Australian, he did not provide a Statement but was mentioned in some: see Chapter 4.

⁹³ See AWM 2DRL/0268 for the broadcasts, and ‘Reveille’, Vol 5, No 5, 31 January 1932, to Vol 7, No 7, 1 March 1934, for the articles. See ADB: Vol 14, 1940-1980, Di-Kel, p 340. Canadian POWs were also kept in this fort in similar conditions: Morton, pp 39-40.

and a bowl of coffee substitute. But it was the sanitary arrangements that attracted most comment: barrels in the corners that soon filled and over-flowed.⁹⁴

Men were generally kept in these conditions for seven or eight days: Groves was there for eight, while some only spent five days; others stated that they were there for 13 or 14 days. It was estimated that about 300 of the AIF were sent to this fort after Bullecourt.⁹⁵

Men were given pencils, paper and envelopes to write to 'make our terrible conditions of punishment known to influential people - members of parliament and the like'. They were told that it was no use writing to their families. Groves wrote to his family, and to friends in the UK, but noted that no letters were delivered: his family found out that he was a POW seven months after his capture. In both his accounts, he stated that the Germans needed labour for defensive work behind their lines, saw the possibility of using POWs for this work and 'hit on the plan of justifying their action by this little subterfuge.'⁹⁶

So, as part of this policy, Groves and his party were marched to a temporary lager about six kilometres behind the Front Line. Until the end of June, they built ammunition storage depots. They were then marched about 15 kilometres to build a railway line: Groves thought it was part of a reserve line of defence if the Germans needed another strategic withdrawal in 1918, such as they had made to the Hindenburg Line. After about three months, for a time, one part of the group was sent about eight kilometres away. In this part of France, the men could hear 'the incessant maddening rumble' of the guns; other working parties behind the lines were under Allied shellfire.

Groves was sent to a military gaol for 21 days for his contacts with a French woman who had been providing POWs with small parcels of food. He was deeply grateful to women who at considerable risk gave, or attempted to give, POWs food from their own limited stores.

A few weeks after his return from gaol, about the middle of November 1917, his party was sent to a lager in Germany. Groves believed that the group was no

⁹⁴ AWM 30: B13.5, Pte JW Johnston, 13th Bn.

⁹⁵ Details of captivity in Fort Macdonald in April 1917 were drawn from a number of Statements in AWM 30: B13.11 and B13.5, as well as from Groves.

⁹⁶ Referring to Fort Macdonald, Bean noted that the German complaint 'was true enough', and that the measures ended in July 1917 when POWs were withdrawn to an agreed distance: OH, Vol IV, pp 342-343, fn 189. This was as a result of an agreement between the British and German Governments at The Hague: see Chapter 5 for its provisions relating to POWs and work.

longer of any use to the Germans as a work unit, not worth 100 grams of black bread and soup per day.⁹⁷

The ‘Listening Hotel’

Even in Germany, attempts were made to obtain information. The most sophisticated means appear to have been installed at the so-called ‘Listening Hotel’ near the officer’s camp at Karlsruhe. This was a collection/distribution centre for ‘all French and British officers’, principally the unwounded.⁹⁸

A tourist hotel was wired as an intelligence-gathering centre, and microphones were planted so that the Germans could put groups of two to six officers together to record their conversations. Because of their size and the limited number of viable locations, sometimes the microphones were found and torn out. Some men remained silent but, over its three-year operations, the hotel seems to have provided the Germans with useful information.⁹⁹

By 1918, it was well known as the ‘Listening Hotel’ and while its secret had been largely compromised, it was still evidently in use. It seems to have been opened selectively: although its capacity was about 60, only about 30 officers were usually held at a time. Evidently, only those officers that might have particular information were put together for three days to a week before they were transferred to the lager.¹⁰⁰

Allied aviation personnel ‘all along’ the Front had known of the hotel’s purpose since at least May 1917. Allegedly, ‘nearly every prisoner’ discovered the secret within a day, but information could be disclosed before this happened. Notices were scratched in the plaster on walls, and under table and chairs, to warn others.¹⁰¹

In all, 48 officers from the Sample went to Karlsruhe: 25 were captured at Bullecourt. Some of the 16 wounded did go to a hotel in Karlsruhe, but there may have been more than one. It seems that ten of the rest of the unwounded officers in the Sample could have been sent there. Thus, Lt G Cox (2 Sqn AFC) spent about a week

⁹⁷ The final chapter, events in November 1918, was published in ‘Reveille’ in November 1933, while the last article appeared in March 1934. The account of his time in Germany was not published.

⁹⁸ Among others, Capts JE Mott (48th) and DP Wells (13th) were treated there. In his UK Statement, Mott said that, while it was not attached to the lager, it ‘was the best place I was ever in in Germany’ (AWM 30: B10.13). A copy of this Statement is in the section at the end of this Study, from p 200. See Chapter 7 for treatment of the wounded.

⁹⁹ Jonathan F Vance (ed): ‘Encyclopaedia of Prisoners of War and Internment’ (ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, 2000), p 148; Dwight R Messimer: ‘Escape’ (Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 1994), p 76.

¹⁰⁰ Messimer, pp 72, 75; Vance, p 148.

¹⁰¹ Messimer, p 75.

in a hotel, and 2/Lt AFG McCulloch (4 Sqn AFC) went to a hotel and was interrogated again two days later.¹⁰²

Lt WH Nicholls (4 Sqn AFC) spent a day in solitary confinement in a hotel and then three days with three British and three French officers. Lt WM Mortensen (2nd ATC) was locked in a hotel room for four days and then interrogated, while Capt GG Gardiner (13th Bn) said that for some days he was locked in a hotel with other officers 'for the purpose of forcing information' from them. 2/Lt GC Smith of his unit was in a hotel for three days before moving to the camp. Lt LP Ridgwell (46th Bn) was at a hotel for a week, but his main complaint was not being allowed to exercise.¹⁰³

Conclusions

In the OH, Bean included accounts of the treatment of German prisoners by the AIF, as well as examples of occasions when the AIF was ordered that 'no prisoners' were to be taken and when no mercy was shown. In Vol VI, he reflected on 'the flagrant breaches of honourable convention', when prisoners were shot, and at a lesser level on how the fondness for souvenirs could risk the Australian 'reputation for decency'. After telling of an incident where there had been a massacre, he excused AIF behaviour by blaming those who had caused the war.¹⁰⁴

While both the AIF and the Germans promptly and thoroughly searched prisoners, if the Germans behaved badly they were not alone. At Bullecourt, a soldier stated that 'Our SM, a new man that I did not know, shot a German to obtain a souvenir. The soldier put up his hands and pleaded for mercy, but he was shot dead and the SM took his field glasses.'¹⁰⁵

Many Statements did not include enough detail to enable more definite conclusions to be made about treatment at and immediately after capture. It is clear that, even within the same action, there were variations in the treatment of prisoners and, especially, the wounded. While there were some murders, most of the harsh treatment seems to have been casual and related to the circumstances of the battle,

¹⁰² AWM 30: B3.5, B3.7. McCulloch did not say how long he was at the hotel, but he had already been interrogated by a German pilot soon after capture.

¹⁰³ AWM 30: B3.9; B6.13(1); B13.5; B10.4.

¹⁰⁴ See for example, Vol III, pp 262-263; Vol IV, p 229, fn 59, p 772, fn 115; Vol V, pp 580, 591; Vol VI, pp 133-135. Vol VI, pp 147, 135 (referring to the incident at pp 134-135) and p 1006, fn 83.

¹⁰⁵ AWM 30: B10.13, Pte PJ Liddy, 48th Bn. SM: warrant officer (sergeant-major). The Canadians were as adept at searching captives as the Germans and the AIF: Morton, p 33.

rather than organised and deliberately brutal or murderous. It is difficult to know what to make of Bean's reference to 'a merciful enemy' shooting severely wounded men in the wire at Bullecourt, let alone Butler's support for this view.

It seems that little brutality was used to extract information from newly captured men. Later, many were to express pride that nothing was given away during interrogations but, on a least one occasion, there was some talk. According to an AIF Intelligence summary dated 17 May 1918, prisoners had disclosed to the Germans that HQ 3rd Div was at Allonville. By 31 May, 4th Div was in the area and a barn sheltering men of 14th Bn was shelled: 18 were killed and 68 were wounded. This was seen as a warning to all captured men against giving any information, or even of talking of such things among themselves.¹⁰⁶

Of the German-Australians, only Klingner mentioned that he was interrogated away from the rest of his party, but his otherwise detailed account gave no further information on the questioning. While Wiese seems to have been pressured to cooperate, other German-Australians did not mention harsh treatment.

Two officers reported the use of listening devices to obtain information: both from 1918, one very close to the end of fighting. While this method of extracting information may have been common, none of the AIF sent to the hotel in Karlsruhe appear to have known whether their conversations were recorded. Knowledge of the 'Listening Hotel' may have been common, but the AIF seems not to have heard of it.

It is possible that the large number of AIF officers captured at Bullecourt had to be accommodated temporarily in a hotel while decisions were made about their next camp, and this may have been the 'Listening Hotel'. Whether or not they were aware of it, conversations of Mortensen, Smith and, possibly, Ridgwell were probably recorded. Gardiner said that information was sought, but did not indicate whether he knew about the means used.

Of those that may have been recorded, Cox, McCulloch and Nicholls were AFC officers and Mortensen was a mining engineer engaged in tunnelling operations. The Germans would have been interested in technological and tactical matters they may have discussed. After Bullecourt, many 4th Div officers were available as potential sources of information. Gardiner had been commissioned in November 1914

¹⁰⁶ OH, Vol VI, p 109, fn 2. Published in 1942, the incident may have been a cautionary tale for the 2nd AIF. Whether any of that force had the opportunity, or the interest, to read it is another matter.

and by April 1917 was a senior, experienced regimental officer. It is less clear why Smith and Ridgwell might have been selected.¹⁰⁷

At the end of the war, some men did not give officers the benefit of the doubt if they thought that performance had been below standard, and a number received unfavourable comments.

Conditions at Fort Macdonald did not seem to be very bad in July 1916; although they may have become worse as the story was told, and by confusion with the situation in 1917. Because of the greater number of men and their status as POR, they were probably worse after Bullecourt. While it is unclear how long some men spent there, the 1917 group was unlucky to be among the first Allied soldiers to be captured after promulgation of retaliatory measures for allegedly poor treatment of prisoners by the Allies.

Groves told of his time at Fort Macdonald near Lille and on a working party in France in detail. There is no doubt that his party was very short of food, but his experiences do not seem to have been altogether typical: his party was not under shell fire and the treatment does not seem to have been brutal.

This Chapter also showed something of how the OH was constructed. His failure to use material in his files and, especially, his stilted language showed Bean protecting the AIF and 53rd Bn at Fromelles. According to Cowey, Murray had spread defeatism and ordered some men to surrender; Ranson and Bowman passed it on to others. Cowey could have been motivated by jealousy. By November 1918, Murray had received two decorations and promotion; the MID Maj Cowey received in 1919 could have rankled. If the surrender was unjustified, it is hard to see how Murray was able to serve as a senior officer in the Second AIF.¹⁰⁸

Because his focus was operational, Bean's included his few references to life in captivity in footnotes: some of the experiences of a very few men were included, following accounts of their capture.

¹⁰⁷ Smith was commissioned in August 1916, Ridgwell in February 1917.

¹⁰⁸ Murray was later awarded the DSO: OH, Vol III, p 388, fn 146. See "Australia in the War of 1939-1945", Series One (Army), Vol III, Barton Maughan: 'Tobruk and El Alamein' (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1966), p 10, fn 9.

CHAPTER 3

FOOD FOR PRISONERS

Agreements at The Hague

Article VII of the Annex to The Hague Convention (1907) charged the government into whose hands POWs had fallen with their maintenance. In the absence of an agreement between belligerents, POWs 'shall be treated as regards board, lodging and clothing on the same footing as the troops of the captive powers'.¹

In the First World War, each combatant had ration standards for its troops, and would not feed POWs better than its own men. Rations became a subject of disagreement and retaliation, and sources of additional friction between belligerents.²

At The Hague in July 1918, the British and German Governments agreed, among other matters, that daily rations should be of 'sufficient quantity and quality', especially meat and vegetables, taking into account restrictions on the food provided to civilian populations. As far as possible, prisoners were to receive the same ration allocations as civilian populations.³

This Agreement specified the number of calories per day that should be provided: 2000 for those not working, 2500 for 'ordinary' workers and 2850 for 'heavy' workers. It also stipulated the daily bread ration: not less than 250 grams, with 150 grams of bread or other cereal added per day for 'ordinary' workers and an additional 150 grams of bread or other cereal added per day for 'heavy' workers. It also allowed that there should be canteens in POW camps, selling such articles of daily use as are available at reasonable prices.⁴

Germany was increasingly unable to honour its undertakings because, with the exception of one period after the winter of 1916-1917, the availability and quality of food deteriorated.

¹ Laws and Customs of War on Land, The Hague, 18 October 1907, Section I, Chapter I.

² Richard B Speed III: 'Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War: A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity' (Greenwood Press, New York, 1990), p 31.

³ Agreement between the British and German Governments concerning Combatant Prisoners of War and Civilians, The Hague, 14 July 1918, Article XLV. This was the second bilateral agreement signed by Britain and Germany during the war. The first, relating primarily to internment and exchange, was signed at The Hague in July 1917: see Chapter 8.

⁴ *ibid*, Articles XLVI, XLVII.

Food in wartime Germany

Germany had not prepared for a long war, and many men from its agricultural workforce enlisted in 1914. Based on misunderstandings of pre-war production and import figures, it then under-estimated the nation's requirements for food. These errors were compounded when its Government did not ensure that the civilian population would receive the food it needed. Rationing of bread was not introduced promptly or consistently, and the imposition of price controls was uncoordinated.⁵

By 1916, Germany was suffering from shortages of many basic products, leading to the fabrication of many substitute or 'ersatz' items. Perhaps more seriously, labour shortages, insufficient fertiliser and problems with railway equipment resulted in a decline in agricultural production, causing food shortages. The 1916 harvest was poor, one of the worst on record, so that the 1916-1917 winter, still known as 'the turnip winter', was a period of 'sharp suffering' in all the major towns. Rations were not always available and, even if they were, there was no guarantee of quality.⁶

According to Offner, except for the winter of 1916-1917 and the summer of 1918, the level of civilian food consumption in Germany approximated to pre-war figures. Apart from these two periods, while there was hunger, there was not an absolute shortage of food in Germany. For the rest of the war, while less was available per head, the problem was not an absolute shortage of food. When people had lost weight and restricted their activities, a smaller amount still allowed them to function adequately. Thus, while there was hunger, with bread, meat and potatoes unavailable for weeks at a time, 'Germany did not starve'.⁷

Whether this assertion is valid is another matter: according to Speed, by November 1918 Germany's civilian population was 'on the brink of mass starvation'.⁸

It has been argued that, according to the nutritional knowledge of the day, German food lacked the fats and proteins needed in cold weather and for the work some POWs had to do. These rations led, in some cases, to near-starvation and disease

⁵ Avner Offer: 'The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation' (Clarendon Press, New York, 1989), pp 25, 45; Gerald D Feldman: 'The Great Disorder: Politics, Economics, and Society in the German Inflation, 1914-1924' (Oxford University Press, New York, 1993), p 58.

⁶ 'Feldman, p 58; Offer, p 29; "Official History of the War", AC Bell: 'A history of the Blockade of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey, 1914-1918' (HMSO, 1961; produced and printed for official purposes 1937), p 571.

⁷ Offer, p 53.

⁸ Speed, pp 73, 186.

among Allied POWs; by 1918, Germany did not have the resources even to feed its armed forces adequately, and they had to be given priority over all others.⁹

Germany's food shortage was soon evident to unwounded prisoners. After they had been assembled at a collecting station, they might have been given a meagre ration of black bread and jam once a day. This would have been accompanied by 'coffee': probably ersatz, made from acorns. This was often better fare than was available in the lagers or on commando; for those on working parties behind the lines, there was no relief from hunger via Red Cross parcels from the Australian Red Cross Society (ARCS).¹⁰

If a soldier was wounded, hospital food might be no better. Behind the lines, the French (often nuns) working in the hospitals might provide some biscuits and wine, but soup, bread and ersatz coffee would be the usual diet, perhaps supplemented on a good day with some tough bacon. When available, this sometimes had to be torn apart with the fingers, as cutlery was not available or could be used as a weapon and was banned. In Germany, food in the hospitals was unlikely to improve.¹¹

With medical treatment, food and parcels were mentioned in most Statements and this, as well as providing a picture of life for the POWs, revealed something of life outside the camps. Some of the AIF knew that there was a shortage of food and perhaps starvation in Germany; rations were poor at best, and some Germans asked for food or tried to buy it. These men understood that they could not be given what was not available; they also knew that, without their parcels, they would not have survived.¹²

Red Cross parcels

When the Germans advised that a man had been captured, and where he was, the ARCS could begin to send the all-important parcels. Many Statements included the date on which they were first received, and whether they arrived regularly and

⁹ Desmond Morton: 'Silent Battle: Canadian Prisoners of War in Germany, 1914-1919' (Lester Publishing, Toronto, 1992), p 49. Vasilis Vourkoutiotis: 'Prisoners of War and the German High Command: The British and American Experience' (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York, 2003), p 23.

¹⁰ These will simply be called 'parcels' in this Study; some men called them 'packets'.

¹¹ AWM 30: B14.1, L/Cpl P Freirat, 53rd Bn.

¹² See Chapter 7 for the treatment of the wounded and sick. The ARCS also provided books and parcels of uniforms, boots, etc. Some units set up funds to ensure their POWs received regular 'foodstuffs': see Chapter 4.

intact. Those working behind the German Front Line did not receive parcels, nor were they available to internees.¹³

These parcels contained a range of goods: particularly tinned food, including oats, tea, cocoa, bully-beef, cheese, biscuits, jams and puddings. They also contained items such as soap that were increasingly unobtainable in Germany. Regardless of rank, each POW was entitled to three parcels each weighing about 5 kilograms per fortnight. The Red Cross also arranged for the provision of bread from either Geneva or Copenhagen and, even if it was mouldy in summer, it was accepted gratefully.¹⁴

Some of the AIF commented that the amount and the quality of food provided to POWs on a regular basis via parcels had a great impact on German morale, and they were surprised that so many parcels were received intact. Moreover, they did not contain the range of 'ersatz' or substitute items that were an increasing feature in rations. This was an important if small victory in the war waged between prisoners and guards.¹⁵

To the end of the war, the Germans ensured that parcels were delivered to lagers and hospitals, as they supplemented and reduced the rations that had to be supplied. They also kept prisoners alive and, more importantly, fit for work.

Officers' entitlements

As noted in the Prologue, officers did not have to work and they received more parcels than ORs. On 5 February 1917, the Honorary Secretary of the ARCS, Miss ME Chomley, noted that 'the Authorities here' accentuated distinctions between ORs and officers by forbidding 'all sorts of common necessities to the men, while the Officers can receive anything from their friends that is not absolutely contraband.'¹⁶

Six months later, the ARCS noted that the War Office had reduced the food sent to ORs, and that this had not been caused by the availability of funds. From 1 October 1917, officers were able to receive two parcels per month each of the same weight as the three parcels sent by the ARCS each fortnight to every man.¹⁷

¹³ Parcels seem sometimes to have been forwarded from Germany to internees in neutral countries.

¹⁴ Robert Jackson: 'The Prisoners, 1914-18' (Routledge, London and New York, 1989), p 66.

¹⁵ Cpl CC Benson (13th Bn) believed that Germany was 'a land of substitutes and prostitutes': Mitchell Library Mss 885, p 44.

¹⁶ See Chapter 5 for NCOs and work.

¹⁷ RC POW Box 132.

Immediately after capture

Although the German armed forces were given first priority for food, as early as mid-1916, there did not seem to be much to spare even in the Front Line. At a collecting station, when an officer asked for a meal for three officers and about 200 ORs, he was told there was nothing for them. After a three-hour march, they were given meat stew and brown bread. Next day, at a hospital, the diet was monotonous and barely sufficient: meat stew, brown bread, coffee, a brown meat paste and jam.¹⁸

When food and drink was available immediately behind the line, it was often deficient. After crawling into a party of Germans, a private was taken behind the lines, his wound was dressed and he was given coffee, bread and cheese. Sent to hospital, he thought that the Germans did not have any food because what was provided was so ‘wretched, poor and insufficient’. A lance-corporal was left in the German first-line trench for 18 hours and only given a cup of coffee substitute. Moved to a casualty clearing station for a day, he was given another cup of coffee substitute and a slice of bread.¹⁹

Although he was hungry, at Mouquet Farm a soldier was offered water and bread that was ‘too bad to eat’.²⁰

Sometimes there was malice mixed with the deprivation of food. Marched back after capture and kept in a shed for two days, Pte H West (51st Bn) was only fed ‘a little bit of black bread and some jam daily’. With about 500 others, of whom 200 were ‘British’, he was put in an old barracks. The food was ‘terrible, and we very nearly starved to death’: a small piece of bread in the morning, a kind of vegetable soup at midday, with no tea or supper. When POWs were sent to erect iron work for aeroplane sheds, a loaf of bread might be thrown into the lorry: ‘the Germans always took good care we did not have it.’²¹

¹⁸ AWM 30, B16.7: Capt C Mills, 31st Bn. Robin S Corfield: ‘Don’t forget me, cobber: The Battle of Fromelles 19/20 July 1916 – An Inquiry’ (Corfield and Co, Rosanna, Vic, 2000), pp 303-306, 325, included photographs and a short biography of Mills.

¹⁹ AWM 30: B16.7, Pte W White, 31st Bn; B14.1, L/Cpl P Freirat, 53rd Bn.

²⁰ AWM 30: B 6.16(1), Pte RE Membrey, 21st Bn.

²¹ AWM 30: B11.3, Pte H West, 51st Bn.

Hospitals behind the line

Food in hospitals behind the lines varied. A 53rd Bn lance-corporal was in hospital for three weeks: the food was bad and the German orderlies took the biscuits and wine sent in by French nuns.²²

Some of the seriously wounded found the situation behind the lines was acceptable. After treatment at a dressing station, a soldier blinded at Pozieres went to a hospital just behind the lines where there was good food with plenty of bread at three of the meals each day. For dinner, patients were given soup, 'fairly good', and sausages but no meat or fish. Another, paralysed at Mouquet Farm, was at a hospital not far from the lines for three weeks, and received 'excellent treatment, with plenty of food and bedclothes.'²³

The Australians could be surprised by the treatment that they were given. After being hit on the back of the head by shrapnel, a man hospitalised near the line for two months noted that he had received the same medical treatment and food as wounded Germans. On a light diet, the food was 'nothing to complain about': rice and apples, regular meals of soup, bread and jam, and coffee. His vision was affected enough for him to be interned in Switzerland as early as December 1916.²⁴

When the Germans found that a private, wounded in the right leg and foot, was too badly wounded to be carried, they left him for recovery later but gave him a cup of coffee. Taken to a field dressing station that night, he was given coffee, biscuits and cigarettes, and stayed there until when he went to hospital. His foot was amputated on 28 February. As he could not eat the German bread at first, he was given white bread, milk and eggs, receiving 'the very best of treatment.' He was moved to Cambrai, where the beds and the food were good and, a few days later, travelled to Germany for more than a day without food.²⁵

Some treatment was not seen as suitable. A sergeant was held behind the lines for seven days and, although the food was not so bad 'when I consider what is served in Germany', he did not think that sausage, black bread and soup were what an invalid wanted. At Mons for ten days, the food deteriorated further.²⁶

²² AWM 30: B14.1, L/Cpl P Freirat.

²³ AWM 30: B5.21, Pte V Mullin, 7th Bn; B6.16(1), Pte WJ Baldock, 21st Bn.

²⁴ AWM 30: B11.3, Pte CG Beresford, 51st Bn. A copy of this Statement is in the section at the end of this Study, from p 200.

²⁵ AWM 30: B17.6, Pte EW Atkinson, 22nd Bn.

²⁶ AWM 30: B13.18, Sgt JS Tomlinson, 15th Bn.

Cull's experiences

Capt WA Cull (22nd Bn) was more critical of food in Germany in his Statement than he was to be in his book: 'The food in the German lagers is very inadequate, coarse and very poor stuff, no self-respecting British pig would readily take it on.'²⁷

For about a fortnight, he was at hospitals not far behind the line. The 'morning meal' was a cup of acorn coffee and a 'junk' of black bread made from a mixture of rye, potatoes and wood pulp. At midday, he was given another cut of black bread with a watery vegetable soup or, as a change, a plate of sauerkraut or boiled carrots. Every second day, he got a cup of cocoa or real coffee without milk or sugar.²⁸

The journey to Germany took nearly three days, during which Cull was occasionally given sleeping draughts, 'to make it as happy as possible.' At one station, women were giving out biscuits and other comforts but for a time, because he was an enemy, he was not given anything; later, he was given some biscuits.²⁹

Before travelling, he was given a meal but, because he was unable to carry it, he had to leave food given to him for the journey. While his escort would not get him a drink of water or share his food, a German woman spoke to Cull and her child gave him some chocolate.³⁰

He was at a hospital for about four months from March 1917, receiving his first parcel there over four months after his capture. A boy offered to buy a tin of meat: he and his mother were starving, with only black bread and soup to eat. On principle, Cull hardened his heart and refused: goods from parcels 'were not for those that had devastated the world, drenched Europe in blood.' He saw these parcels as the prisoners' salvation and, because they meant that the Germans had to provide less rations and made POWs more fit for work, parcels were always distributed. There was some theft initially, but armed guards were placed on trains carrying the parcels.³¹

Even in hospital, all parcels were searched and the Germans were 'perpetually puzzled' that these contained nothing 'substitute'. This did more than anything to

²⁷ AWM 30: B17.6; W Ambrose Cull: 'At All Costs' (Australasian Authors' Agency, Melbourne, 1919).

²⁸ *ibid*, p 97.

²⁹ *ibid*, pp 104.

³⁰ *ibid*, pp 135, 136. He was on crutches.

³¹ *ibid*, pp 112-113.

convince ‘the intelligent’ Germans that propaganda about starvation in the UK was just that.³²

The ration included some ‘good’ soup, a little boiled meat (very well done), red cabbage and a little milk pudding. It was gradually reduced and ‘coarsened’, so that Cull’s mainstay was a liberal measure of milk from which the cream had been separated. At 6am, he was given a cup of unsweetened black coffee and a slice of bread. At 9am, breakfast: a cup of unsweetened acorn coffee and three small slices of bread with a small portion of curd-like cheese in which there were a few caraway seeds. On the rare occasions when it was provided, raw fish was given to a Russian prisoner.

As meals decreased in bulk, they ‘increased in aroma’: the meat, apparently tinned, was often rotten; the soup ‘announced’ itself as soon as the door opened. He was sometimes given raw bacon that he would not eat and, on a few occasions, small pieces of smoked fish that had turned green during storage.³³

Before he began to receive his parcels, AIF ORs from a nearby lager visited Cull and gave him goods from their parcels: food, cigarettes, toilet necessities, under-clothing: things that he ‘desired’. For weeks, he had been ravenous but had refused to ask ‘a favour’. One of the visitors, a corporal, was surprised that he had been so badly treated, thinking that as an officer he would have been ‘given more consideration’.³⁴

In July 1917, for about four months, Cull went to Karlsruhe where about 100 of the 150 officers were receiving parcels. An emergency reserve was created and, while there was never enough to go round, it ‘topped off’ the ration.³⁵

There was ‘a severe economy’ at this camp, the menu of acorn coffee, black bread, thin soup and potatoes and carrots ‘running its baleful course’: without Red Cross assistance, many men would have slowly starved. Some food was available at the canteen at a price: small tins of sardines and sugar. An old Red Cross corporal ‘hung around’ at meals and pleaded for anything left over. His lunch was always the same: a ‘junk’ of black bread, a raw turnip and a pinch of salt, packed in a handkerchief. Another man was ‘always pleading’ for scraps to take home to his

³² *ibid*, pp 125, 113. The German term was ‘ersatz’.

³³ *ibid*, pp 116-117.

³⁴ *ibid*, pp 108-109.

³⁵ *ibid*, p 151.

family. In a photo, they looked like ghouls and they were, ‘without a doubt, starving’, trying to live on what would have been sufficient food for one person.³⁶

Cull was clear that the POWs knew that the Germans were suffering; they were often told that ‘the cupboard was empty’. While no mention was made of meat, the sausage remained but was more than ever a mystery. Their parcels were so satisfactory that POWs were offered money for the German ration and, if the offer had been accepted, the food would have been distributed outside the lager.³⁷

At first, parcels were only inspected ‘nominally’. Then they had to be opened in front of officials, an acknowledgement of the contents was given and goods were stored until they were needed. Tins were opened and searched before being handed over. In spite of these restrictions, when they were well supplied, the officers always kept a reserve of tins hidden.³⁸

In October 1917, Cull and the ‘British’ officers were moved to Freiburg for six weeks and then to Heidelberg for a fortnight. He was still an infirm case. Two parties combined their supplies and saved tinned meat, pudding and custard powder for a Christmas dinner; stolen potatoes were roasted: ‘a great spread’.³⁹

Moving further back

Those captured unwounded at Bullecourt and confined for varying periods in the fort at Lille had a difficult time: the food was as deficient as were the sanitary arrangements at Lille, as described in Chapter 2. By the time that they arrived there, they had seen something of what the Germans would provide.

They were given a third of a loaf and coffee substitute per man, and locked in a church. Next morning, they were given another third of a loaf as the day’s ration; on the way to the fort by train and on foot, the daily ration was a quarter of a loaf of bread and a bowl of soup per man. One of those confined there for eight days stated that, as Prisoners of Respite (POR); the daily ration per man was one slice of bread and a bowl of coffee substitute.⁴⁰

When a lance-corporal marched to a village, he was among the late arrivals and only a small piece of black bread was available. He was in the fort for five days

³⁶ *ibid*, pp 154, 156-157, 158-159.

³⁷ *ibid*, pp 159, 164.

³⁸ *ibid*, p 170.

³⁹ *ibid*, pp 174, 184.

⁴⁰ AWM 30: B13.5, Pte JW Johnston, 13th Bn.

where the daily ration was a drink of water and a loaf weighing about a kilogram between 16 men. He was then sent to work at various places behind the lines.⁴¹

Another man from his unit said that he was in the fort for seven days without food or water. On 20 April, his group was released, given a piece of bread and a drink of coffee each and marched 20 kilometres.⁴²

Working parties behind the line

Many of those captured at Bullecourt went from the fort to working parties behind the lines, some under Allied shell fire. At Quartes in Belgium, the weekly ration per man was a kilogram-loaf of bread, a very small amount of preserved blood pudding and of butter substitute, a few lumps of sugar, a dessert-spoon of jam substitute and, occasionally, some horse-flesh. They were given chicory water or coffee substitute morning and night and, occasionally, cocoa substitute.⁴³

Some Australians were sent to repair roads and to build dugouts, light railways and ammunition dumps behind the German lines for more than two months. They worked 12-hour days on a small ration of bread and 'soup', with coffee substitute twice per day; sometimes it was a quarter of a loaf per man, sometimes a third. One man became ill and was sent to hospital, suffering from 'General Debility and weakness' caused by bad and insufficient food. He did not get any special treatment, but the food improved.⁴⁴

After working behind the lines for three months, a soldier was sent away for a month's 'rest'; the food and living conditions were just as bad. Parties were sent to work on farms and given food 'on the quiet' by French farmers.⁴⁵

Some men died of the combined effects of overwork and starvation: Pte Blanchard died at Seclin from starvation in August 1917, as did Pte HP Demasson in September after coming to a lager from a working party.⁴⁶

⁴¹ AWM 30: B13.18, L/Cpl FAWC Peachey, 15th Bn. This was after Bullecourt.

⁴² *ibid*: Pte W Green, 15th Bn.

⁴³ AWM 30: B13.18, L/Cpl FAWC Peachey. On 5 November 1917, with Pte J Lee (14th Bn) and an Englishman, he escaped from the working party. Although it took more than ten days to reach Holland, neither account mentioned what food they had, or how they had acquired it. See Chapter 6.

⁴⁴ AWM 30: B13.5, Pte JW Johnston, 13th Bn.

⁴⁵ AWM 30: B13.11, Pte GJ Collins, 14th Bn.

⁴⁶ AWM 30: B13.11, Pte CN Stewart, 14th Bn. Demasson died of 'inflammation of the kidneys and chronic inflammation of the bowels' on 19 September 1917. He had been working behind the lines, and contracted dysentery shortly after his arrival at the lager; he did not respond to treatment. See Rachel Christensen (ed): 'To All My Dear People: The Diary and Letters of Private Hubert P Demasson 1916-17' (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1988), pp 153, 154.

Even on working parties, individual Germans could show some compassion. While another 14th Bn man did not witness any ill-treatment behind the lines, his party was 'practically starved.' Once, when he fainted, a Red Cross orderly gave him food and a drink, took him into a shed and gave his own coat to the Australian.⁴⁷

For three months, an 11th Bn soldier said his group was 'worked hard and starved'; he saw a man from his unit die of starvation and overwork. After a complaint about the food, the town commandant told the men that the ration scale was, in descending order: German soldier; German civilian; Russian soldier prisoner; French civilian; French soldier, and the 'Tommy'. If there was any food left, 'you dog-Australians will get some'.⁴⁸

The aftermath of an accident

One man's experiences showed the vagaries of the provision of food, and of the consequences of the working party regime. Pte WP Griffiths (11th Bn) was not wounded when captured and was sent to work on the railway and on barges behind the lines. Most of the food was supplied by French people but cooked by the Germans, leading to a reduction in the ration. Then he was sent work, under Allied shellfire as a POR, in an ammunition dump where it was impossible to do the required work on the ration.

In June 1917, he was seriously injured in an accident and taken to hospital. The food was 'fairly good', especially after that at the work camp. Three weeks later, he was sent to a POW hospital where more surgery was performed. As a serious case, he was given two eggs, a small piece of white bread and a cup full of milk every day but, apart from this special diet, the food was 'uneatable'. Some weeks later, he was sent to Germany, a two-day journey during which there was irregular medical attention and 'rotten' food. When he began to receive Red Cross parcels, he was able to 'put aside' the ration.⁴⁹

Journeys

Journeys to camps and hospitals in Germany seem generally to have been slow and hungry affairs. Conditions on some hospital trains were good, but experiences

⁴⁷ AWM 30: B13.11, Pte HA Black.

⁴⁸ AWM 30: B5.44, Pte VA Perrie. POWs would not have believed the priority given to the Russians.

⁴⁹ AWM 30: B10.11. See Chapter 7 for an account of his medical treatment.

were mixed. A 53rd Bn lance-corporal was sent on a 24-hour journey on a hospital train during which he was not fed. He only received two slices of bread and two cups of coffee during the day he was at Lille: ravenous, he could have eaten much more. During a two-day journey, he was not given any food and only had water to drink. However, when he travelled for two days to Germany, he received 'good nourishing food.'⁵⁰

For a captain who travelled for 48 hours to reach a hospital, the food 'was not worth having': black coffee, soup of a kind served in dirty bowls and inedible black bread. At the hospital, the food was 'a little better' but not fit for invalids. After six days, he was moved to Germany.⁵¹

En route to internment, a 51st Bn man was sent with a ration of bread, sausage and butter for the 2-hour journey. The food at Constance was 'quite good'. From there, he went on an eight or nine hour journey with only a piece of bread as a ration. He was there for three weeks until he went to Switzerland on 19 December 1916. The food was only 'moderate', not as good as at Constance, but his parcels were sent to him.⁵²

ORs' hospitals in Germany

A number of ORs set out the daily rations in the hospitals in Germany and these make it clear why the Red Cross parcels were so vital to the patients. For the 53rd Bn lance-corporal, the daily ration was:

Breakfast: A loaf of black bread for nine men, sometimes with a small portion of jam, for 24 hours, and a cup of coffee substitute per man.

9am: A cup of coffee and sometimes a cup of milk.

Dinner: Half an ounce of meat of doubtful origin and a bowl of vegetable soup.

3pm: A cup of coffee.

Supper: A portion of liquid cheese. 'What it lacked in quantity was more than made up in its overpowering smell.' It was served with a small amount of margarine and two potatoes.

⁵⁰ AWM 30: B14.1, L/Cpl P Freirat.

⁵¹ AWM 30: B13.5, Capt DP Wells, 13th Bn. He gave details about many aspects of captivity.

⁵² AWM 30: B11.3, Pte CG Beresford.

After he had been at the lager for three weeks, his stomach started to trouble him and he was vomiting blood almost every day. He complained, but said that he was never examined or given any treatment. His RCp did not come regularly and were often held back. In January 1917, he was X-rayed and then fed on one and a half litres of milk and two small buns per day.⁵³

For one man, receiving his first parcel was ‘an event worth remembering.’ Showing a mixture of quality, the daily ration at the hospital at Verden was:

Breakfast: Three slices of black bread, butter substitute and a pot of ‘coffee’.

Dinner: Barley soup ‘which was fairly good’.

3pm: Same as breakfast.

Supper: Thin, watery vegetable soup of poor quality.⁵⁴

Another man from his unit had his leg amputated at that hospital in April 1917. He was not given a special diet: three slices of black bread per day, soup at dinner and, at night, soup with a little jam and butter thrown in. After three months, he was transferred to a lager.⁵⁵

A 15th Bn sergeant spent nearly all his captivity in hospital. The food was ‘of a very poor order’, with soup at all meals. The arrival of parcels was a ‘big event’, as was the day when spinach and potatoes were served. He had had surgery the previous day, and was annoyed for the rest of his time in Germany that he ‘did not get a fair run.’⁵⁶

In Germany, a German-Australian from 11th Bn found that the food was ‘poor and scanty’: two pieces of brown bread per day, coffee substitute, and a very small morsel of meat three times per week. For nearly two months, he was then at an infirmary where, occasionally, he was given parcels of the dead. The “ration” was coffee (some substitute), “sandstorm soup” and at 3pm, two pieces of dark German bread to last for 24 hours.’ He did not receive parcels during his captivity.⁵⁷

A lance-corporal found food at another hospital neither nourishing nor varied. The daily ration was two bowls of ‘soup’, two small slices of bread, two cups of a compound of burnt barley (called ‘coffee’). Meals were at 7am, 12noon and 5pm.

⁵³ AWM 30: B 14.1, L/Cpl P Freirat.

⁵⁴ AWM 30: B10.13, Pte JA Rose, 48th Bn.

⁵⁵ *ibid*: Pte PW Symonds.

⁵⁶ AWM 30: B13.18, Sgt JS Tomlinson.

⁵⁷ AWM 30: B 5.44, Pte OB Oden. Sandstorm soup was ‘a sort of broth made out of bonedust’; see AWM 30: B16.4 (Pte DB Storey, 30th Bn).

RCp were 'our greatest standby'. He noted that tins from parcels were kept, asking whether the Germans re-used the metal and solder.⁵⁸

Some POWs believed that the Germans were doing what they could. For a 28th Bn man, food in a hospital behind the lines for four months from July 1916 was 'very good'; he also found the overall treatment in Germany 'very good'. He received a 'fair amount' of medical attention and as much food as was possible: 'They being apparently being short of food themselves.' He was lucky: he was not in Germany for all of the 'turnip winter' or the deterioration of the food supply that followed. Few of his comrades let their captors off so lightly. Interned in Switzerland for nine months, he was not impressed by the food there.⁵⁹

Another man was in hospital at Munster for six weeks and the food was 'fair'. This neutral word was used by many POWs to describe the varying food and conditions encountered. Sometimes, the situation was not good: if the Germans 'had the stuff we got it, if not we had to do without.'⁶⁰

Even for incapacitated men, the food was inadequate. For the paralysed man, treatment at Darmstadt was 'very rough', and the food was scarcely sufficient for bare existence. He was sent to Constance, where special meals were arranged for the visit of the Swiss Commission examining POWs for internment, and then to Switzerland.⁶¹

The daily ration for the blind man at hospital in Munster was:

6.30am: Unsweetened coffee without milk.

11.30am: Cabbage water soup, cabbage and a little potato. One day a week, a little meat. On the No 2 diet, Mullin also got a little rice.

2.30pm: Unsweetened coffee without milk, nothing to eat.

5.30pm: Soup, sometimes a beef-tea, very salty. This was the last meal of the day.

The day's ration also included two small breakfast rolls. There was never any stewed fruit, but occasionally there were 'a couple of eggs': at least half were bad. About two weeks before he was exchanged, he received a Red Cross parcel, two parcels of bread and one of cheese from Switzerland.⁶²

⁵⁸ AWM 30: B13.5, L/Cpl R Wallach, 13th Bn.

⁵⁹ AWM 30: B6.9(2), Pte A Thorp. See Chapter 8 for his time in Switzerland.

⁶⁰ AWM 30: B17.6, Pte EW Atkinson, 22nd Bn.

⁶¹ AWM 30: B6.16(1), Pte WJ Baldock, 21st Bn.

⁶² AWM 30: B5.21, Pte V Mullin, 7th Bn.

A 51st Bn man hit in the head by shrapnel was bed-ridden until the last few days before he was sent to Switzerland. He had not received any RCp, and the ration was so poor that he relied on what was sent by British soldiers in the nearby lager. His light diet was three very small bread rolls for the day, a cup of coffee at 7am, very thin un-nourishing soup at noon, and a cup of coffee at 6pm. On the regular diet, he received a ration of ordinary bread instead of the rolls.⁶³

Officers' hospitals in Germany

While officers received additional parcels and were able to buy more food, they were as concerned about the supply as the ORs. The 31st Bn captain was in a lazarette for three months and the food was 'distinctly bad.' For most prisoners, the fare was cabbage or barley soup, occasionally including a small cube of meat, brown bread, unsweetened coffee without milk and, sometimes, potatoes. Patients on a special diet, ordered by the German doctor, received a glass of wine or milk or cocoa, or mashed potatoes with a slice of meat each day.⁶⁴

For eight days, a 13th Bn captain was with three other officers in a hospital for ORs. There they received special food, for which they had to pay. For ten weeks, he was in the (officers') hospital at Karlsruhe, and then in the lager for a fortnight. The hospital food was 'decidedly better' than in the lager, where it was 'very bad': black soup made from the leaves of trees at the camp, a small issue of bread and an inedible bowl of sauerkraut. The BRC issued a tin of milk and a packet of biscuits per head while he was there. His parcels began to arrive as he left Karlsruhe.⁶⁵

Wounded at Bullecourt, another captain remained in the trenches for three days, but was given food and water. In the larger hospitals, the food was better than elsewhere. When he went to the lagers, he 'felt the pinch of hunger' many times until his parcels began to arrive, when he did without the ration almost entirely.⁶⁶

Mott seems to have been with Wells at Hameln, following a 36-hour journey during which they were given 'some soup' at a station. An area in this hospital for ORs was partitioned for this group of officers and they were treated 'extra well'. While the ORs were also treated well, they did not receive the same amount of food as

⁶³ AWM 30: B11.3, Pte CG Beresford.

⁶⁴ AWM 30: B16.7, Capt C Mills, 31st Bn. Of this time, he said that, with no letters or RCp, he regarded 'the time spent in a German hospital as the most forlorn period' of a POW's life.

⁶⁵ AWM 30: B13.5, Capt DP Wells.

⁶⁶ AWM 30: B10.13, Capt JE Mott, 48th Bn. His UK Statement is in the section from p 200.

the officers: coffee in the morning, a meal including meat at midday and black bread, cheese and coffee in the evening. A Relief Committee issued biscuits and, very generously, British prisoners sent biscuits to these officers.⁶⁷

For about a month, Mott was in Karlsruhe hospital. The food was very good:

7.30am: Mug of unsweetened coffee with milk.

9am: Daily ration of black bread, about 250 grams, with a small portion of honey.

11am: Plate of rice and milk and a glass of hot milk.

12noon: Six days out of seven, fish or meat (about 125 grams), plenty of potatoes and some other vegetables, such as carrots or turnips, and stewed fruit.

3pm: Mug of coffee.

4.30pm: Mug of cocoa with sugar and milk.

6pm: Dish of soup, and possibly a slice of German sausage.

The cocoa and rice were extras for the more seriously ill; the cocoa 'was excellent.' Small wonder that he was able to say 'honestly...this was the best place I was ever in in Germany.'

Officers' camps

Once they left hospital, differences in the treatment of officers and ORs grew, but being an officer did not always guarantee better rations. Mills went to a camp where the food was 'typically low-class German': bowls of mixed vegetables, bread, bean or cabbage soup, meat twice per week finely chopped in the vegetables, unsweetened coffee with milk in the mornings. Apples or oranges were provided twice per week, as was stewed fruit; plates of 'liquid cheese' were also available. This diet was 'just sufficient to sustain life in a normally healthy man', but Russian officers living on it alone looked thin and underfed.⁶⁸

A 13th Bn captain was sent to 'a reprisal camp'. As at most other camps, the food was bad, with meat a luxury from the past. Prisoners were entirely dependent on Red Cross parcels and could not have survived on the German ration.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ During a subsequent thirty six-hour journey, his party was also given food at one station. Twice in 13 lines, Mott pointed out that Hameln was a camp for ORs.

⁶⁸ AWM 30: B16.7.

⁶⁹ AWM 30: B13.5, Capt DP Wells.

At another tough camp, where Mott began to receive his parcels, officers cooked their own food once tins had been emptied by the Germans. The canteen did not sell food. This was a 'strafe' camp and conditions were 'very bad indeed'. The food was 'totally inadequate' and without parcels they would 'undoubtedly have starved'. The ration was:

Breakfast: Cup of unsweetened cocoa substitute without milk.

Midday: Soup made from a kind of cockle and water, or potatoes and fish that smelt 'very much' and was very hard, or occasionally horse meat.

Afternoon: Tea made from leaves and grass.

Evening: Some kind of thin soup and perhaps a cup of coffee substitute (burnt barley).⁷⁰

In addition, the prisoners were issued with a ration of about 1.5 kilograms of bread once per week. It was made 'with a certain percentage of sawdust, and this was horrible stuff'. While ordinary German black rye bread was 'not bad', what was issued here was 'quite different'.

Guards openly admitted that they were nearly starving, and they picked over the rubbish bin each day for scraps. An under-officer spoke bitterly about parcels and the numbers that came through, including the good things that the Germans never saw: it was not possible to buy butter and people hardly knew what it was. Mott commented specifically on the fact that, although the Germans were short of food, they did not steal from parcels. Very few were robbed, and he knew of only one case where a package from American Express was full of bricks instead of food.⁷¹

An AFC officer, shot down in June 1917, found the bread at Heidelberg was edible but the accommodation poor; at Augustabad, the bread was 'too black to eat'.⁷²

While they were kept for five days in a portion of a fortress outside a town, a party including Lt Col TR Marsden (5th MG Bn) was only given soup twice daily. Conditions improved when they moved into the camp proper. Later, at Karlsruhe, POWs received bread and soup twice per day, while at Cologne the food was poor: half a loaf of bread every six days and soup.⁷³

⁷⁰ 'Strafe': punishment.

⁷¹ Pte RT Ayres (13th Bn) commented that parcels did more to break German morale than anything else: AWM PR 89/136. Given the overall number that must have been sent, remarkably few parcels seem to have been robbed. Many others were not received.

⁷² AWM 30: B3.10, Lt VA Norvill, 2 Sqn AFC.

⁷³ AWM 30: B16.5. He was captured on 17 September 1918.

Lagers and commandos

While officers' accounts were sometimes more detailed, much the same picture emerged from ORs' Statements. As an NCO, the 51st Bn lance-corporal did not have to work at a lager, but was forced to rise at 5.30am for a parade, preceded by a cup of coffee substitute. Parcels were often held back and stored in a room in the cookhouse. This was supposedly a reprisal for the treatment given to German POWs in the UK. A French POW had the keys to the store and would allow prisoners to steal some of the parcels, as many as 60 or 70 per night. For some weeks, they were shared 'with our own men'; the Germans did not seem to miss what had been taken.⁷⁴

A private from 21st Bn was not properly treated for nephritis at Nuremburg lazarette: the food was 'rotten'. Part of his 'treatment' was not to eat eggs: they were 'unheard of' for POWs.⁷⁵

Following hospitalisation, a 51st Bn warrant-officer was at Lechfeld for seven months before he escaped. The food was 'atrocious': the staple diet was turnips and water, with 160 grams of bread per day. What was called meat, 'dried black horse (or some other) flesh', was rarely available. While men 'practically lived' on their parcels, for four months they were withheld as a punishment for having refused to work at Nuremburg. Bread normally received from Switzerland was also withheld.⁷⁶

He was told by a Russian that, in three weeks at Lechfeld, 580 Italian POWs had died of starvation, ill-treatment and cold. Only the 'British' retaliated against bad treatment and, as a result, were not treated as badly as other nationalities.

For over three weeks, a corporal lived on the German ration at a lager: 'absolutely rotten and barely sufficient to keep me alive.' Breakfast was a piece of black bread, issued for 24 hours but hardly sufficient for one meal, and a cup of 'tea'. A bowl of soup, made from grass, leaves and the refuse from the kitchens was dinner: 'it was awful stuff.' At 2pm, a cup of coffee substitute, with supper at 6pm: a bowl of the same soup as at dinner. The BRC gave him two 'help' parcels before he received his first parcel from the Red Cross, and he was then independent of the ration. Seven weeks later, he left to be exchanged.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ AWM 30: B14.1, L/Cpl P Freirat.

⁷⁵ AWM 30: B6.16(1), Pte AE Hatchard.

⁷⁶ Parcels were stopped for March/April 1917 because parcels for French POWs had included instructions on how to destroy German property. As an NCO, he was not required to work and was kept in a separate compound, while the working NCOs remained with the rest of the prisoners. He escaped from a farm near this lager: AWM 30: B11.3, WOII SA Edwards.

⁷⁷ AWM 30: B10.13, Cpl JE Symonds, 48th Bn.

Although his wound had not healed, the 22nd Bn amputee was sent to a lager where the food was bad, sometimes impossible to eat. His parcels began to arrive after three weeks and, until then, he was 'kept going' via the parcels of those that had left the lager or returned to the UK. The canteen did not sell food.⁷⁸

A 48th Bn man found the ration at a lager was 'mostly soup of a very poor quality and a poor class of bread.' As this man was receiving parcels, his ration went to the Russians who would eat, he said, 'as much as they could get irrespective of quality.' German sentries also tried to buy POWs' rations.⁷⁹

An 11th Bn German-Australian found Dulmen lager 'a terrible place. We were given practically nothing to eat.' At Dobritz, he received food parcels from the relief committee every week: three small tins of condensed milk, three tins of bully beef, tea, cocoa and four packets of cigarettes.⁸⁰

West's account

West told of food and conditions on commandos in some detail, and made suggestions about improving the Red Cross' parcels. For two weeks at Dulmen, the food was very bad: mainly soup made from stinging nettles that prisoners were forced to gather. Each morning, they were given substitute coffee and a small portion of bread.⁸¹

He then joined a commando of about 500 POWs of different nationalities at the Wulfrath stone quarry. The work was very hard: much too strenuous for 'half starved' men. The food was soup made from horse-beans or carrots, but there was a larger issue of bread than at Dulmen. The only meat he saw was 'some rotten sausage' that was impossible to eat. The coffee substitute was made from acorns.

Because of their work and the small amount of food that they were given, the party 'got into a bad state, and nearly all the men came out in boils.' West was sent back to a lager because of a 'big boil or lump' on the back of his neck and, after this was cut, he remained in the camp for eight months. Coffee substitute in the morning was followed at midday by turnip and water soup, with more soup at tea-time supposedly of meal but mainly water. This came with a small amount of bread shared between 13 men. The canteen did not sell food.

⁷⁸ AWM 30: B17.6, Pte EW Atkinson.

⁷⁹ AWM 30: B10.13, Pte PW Symonds.

⁸⁰ AWM 30: B5.44, Pte OB Oden.

⁸¹ AWM 30: B11.3, Pte H West, 51st Bn.

By this time, West was receiving his parcels. While they came in good condition, they were opened in front of him and the contents minutely examined: even biscuits were broken up. POWs were allowed to draw tinned goods when they liked; the tins were opened and the contents handed over. The Germans kept the tins, evidently so that the material could not be used in escapes.

West was once given 'semi-dark cells' for three or four days for not saluting a German NCO. Every third or fourth day, turnip soup supplemented bread and water. He was sent to a paper factory at Walsum where the work was not as hard as it had been in the quarry, but the food was 'terrible, absolutely unfit to eat, even worse than we received at Walfruth.' Without parcels, 'we should undoubtedly have starved', and it would have been impossible to do the set work on the ration.

For his last weeks there, none of the POWs received any parcels: whether by order or because of traffic congestion, West could not say. Many German girls also worked at this factory and, when the overseer was out of the way, they would ask the POWs for food, or offer to buy it. They 'looked weak and badly nourished' and he believed that they were nearly starving.

While the Red Cross parcel system was working well and was 'generally appreciated', he suggested that, instead of tinned fruit, 'only a luxury', Quakers' oats or bacon and 'fruit salts' should be included. Few men cared for the 'café-au-lait' included in their parcels. There was little to choose between the bread that came from Berne or Copenhagen in winter but, in summer, it was mouldy regardless of its origin. Biscuits sent in place of bread were appreciated, even if they were very hard and had to be soaked in water. They were then 'very good indeed'; without that treatment, they kept for a long time.

West noted that food had 'gradually got worse in quality and less in quantity.' POWs used to be issued with fish, which they never touched anyway, but that had gone and the bread ration had also been reduced. He believed that the Germans were in a very bad state, cultivating more ground and forcing men returning from the front on leave to work on farms or in factories.⁸²

⁸² West escaped from Walsum, arriving in Holland after four nights and three days: see Chapter 6.

The AAMC party

While the AAMC party was exchanged in February 1918, in accordance with the Geneva Convention, they commented that ‘men cannot live solely on the ration doled out by the Germans’. Their parcels arrived after about ten weeks; then they were independent of the rations and ‘rarely touched them’. At Dulmen, the ration was turnips, mangolds and carrots, ‘and a very wretched quality (*sic*) of what they called “meat”’: the POW cooks called it ‘sea lion’. It stank so badly when it was cooked that it drove the ‘Fritzes’ from the cookhouses.⁸³

Consequences of hunger

In at least one case, there was terrible punishment for hunger. A number of men mentioned the death of Pte J Miller (16th Bn) at St Saulve in July 1917: he was starving and jumped over a low wall to collect potatoes just outside the lager and was shot while returning.⁸⁴

At Gustrow, a Russian trying to steal potatoes from the cookhouse garden was shot by a guard who was later killed by other Russians. Soon after this, a guard pilfering potatoes was shot by another German who thought that he was a Russian.⁸⁵

After the Armistice

Perrie was near Liege in Belgium when the Armistice was signed and was one of the Australians ‘cared for by the kind Belgians’. Another man captured at Dernancourt told how only German officers and NCOs remained with his working party after the Armistice. The ex-POWs were given a pass eventually, but no food, and told to head for Allied lines. He too was fed by the Belgians.⁸⁶

For nearly two years, a 53rd Bn man was at a coal mine, and his party worked for four days after the Armistice. When they went on strike, they were not fed for two days and ‘Revolutionaries’ had to intervene to resolve the matter.⁸⁷

⁸³ AWM 30: B11.10, L/Cpl E Gaunt, 13th Fd Amb. See Chapter 2.

⁸⁴ See, for example, Cpl L Rilal (15th Bn, AWM 30: B13.5), Cpl J Royston and Pte H Giese (13th Bn, AWM 30: B13.5).

⁸⁵ Cpl CC Benson (13th Bn): Mitchell Library Mss 885, p 35.

⁸⁶ AWM 30: B5.44. See also Pte Christen Eriksen (16th Bn), AWM 30: B13.22. Pte GB Jochinke (AWM 30: B10.5, 4th Pnr Bn). He had remained behind the German lines.

⁸⁷ AWM 30: B14.1, Pte J Ryan, 53rd Bn. See Chapter 9 for the revolution in Germany in October and November 1918.

Weight loss

A few accounts mentioned the impact of food shortages on their weight and it is possible to assess the consequences. A 29th Bn sergeant weighed 70 kilograms when he was captured; when he returned to the UK, he weighed less than 43 kilograms.⁸⁸

Cull had been very badly wounded and was in constant pain but, in the third month of his captivity, his weight had dropped from 79.5 kilograms to about 41 kilograms. An OR, badly wounded in the leg and back at Bullecourt, lost over 22 kilograms in three and a half months. He re-gained some weight when he began to receive parcels.⁸⁹

A lieutenant said that, in the three months he did not receive parcels, his weight went down by about 25 kilograms. When he began to receive his parcels, six weeks after capture, a 13th Bn lance-corporal's weight increased from just under 47 kilograms to about 62 kilograms.⁹⁰

A private who had worked behind the lines for seven months until he became ill did not receive parcels for nearly ten months. It spoke well for their contents that he put on between 25 and 31 kilograms in the next three months. Previously, he had received a 450-gram loaf of bread per day and poor quality soup twice per day. He was one of many that did not eat German rations after he received parcels and 'the splendid bread from Switzerland' regularly.⁹¹

Conclusions

Australia had cheap and plentiful food, and the AIF seems to have been well fed. Regardless of their other experiences in captivity, the availability and quality of food was vital to all AIF POWs: few Statements do not refer to poor rations or to how vital parcels were to survival. The emphasis that was placed on the regular arrival of parcels was common to all POWs. Surprisingly, there did not seem to be any resentment of officers' additional entitlements to food.

⁸⁸ LtCol H Sloan: 'The Purple and Gold: A History of the 30th Battalion', (Halstead Press, Sydney, 1938), p 320. Sgt ER Ridley did not provide a Statement but contributed an article to the unit history about his time as a POW. See Chapter 5 for the impact on two men of six weeks' work behind the lines. Weights have been converted to metric measures.

⁸⁹ Cull, p 118; L/Cpl GWD Bell (16th Bn): Mitchell Library Mss 893, p 61-62, 74.

⁹⁰ AWM30: B13.11, Lt AJ McQuiggin, 14th Bn; AWM PRO0140, p 56: L/Cpl LR Davies.

⁹¹ AWM 30: B13.22, Pte JF Ulliyott, 16th Bn.

According to a captain who was a POW from August 1916 to December 1918, German rations were always insufficient to support a man in normal health, and hard labour would reduce a POW to absolute exhaustion within a very short time. It was impossible to say too much of the ARCS: its parcels of food and clothing saved the lives of the majority of the AIF prisoners. He had lived entirely on those sent to him. His comments would probably have been enthusiastically endorsed by ORs who had been on working parties behind the lines, or in the mines or quarries.⁹²

In spite of the provisions of The Hague Convention, as Perrie was so bluntly told, Australian OR POWs were never going to be a high priority for whatever food was available: first the German armed forces, then the cities and towns, then the POWs. Regardless of intentions, the 1918 German-British Agreement was not going to change the situation in Germany. If it was any consolation, the AIF could see that Russians and to some extent Italians, existing only on German rations, were in an immeasurably worse situation than other Allied POWs.

While Germany may not have starved, for many Germans including those in the Army this seems to have been close by November 1918, and there were implications in this situation for POWs' rations. Some POWs were aware of the increasingly desperate food situation in Germany: they saw the poor quality and quantity of food and the growing number of 'substitutes' in rations. These were not adequate to feed guards' families, as was shown by the frequent approaches for left-over food, or offers to buy it. The impact on German morale of the flow of parcels into the lagers and hospitals must have been devastating; the under-officer was probably not the only one to have been bitter.⁹³

Numbers of unwounded Australians were forced to work behind the German lines with grossly inadequate rations. Many were to be hospitalised as a result of sickness brought on by over-work and starvation. Some were harshly treated and poorly fed in Germany and sent out on commandos. There seems to have been an element of luck involved in the treatment, and to an extent the food, that individual POWs received. Those sent to farms were better off than most of those who remained in lagers but, while many said they were well treated, this was not always the case.

While only a few men gave details of weight-loss during captivity, accounts of the poor quality and the limited amount of food were consistent. Many said that, as a

⁹² AWM 30: B6.16(1), Capt AS Robertson, 21st Bn.

⁹³ Offer, p 53.

result, they fainted from weakness or developed sores and illnesses from poor, inadequate food.

When the Armistice was signed, some Australians were able to leave their camps but were not given any food, often because there was none available. Those behind the German lines and those who headed for the Allied lines were rescued by the Belgians. It is not clear whether the men who commented on the generosity of the Belgians were aware of the stresses of over four years' occupation by the Germans.

Perhaps Pte LH Barry (1st Fd Coy Engrs) summarised the position best: the further away a POW was from the German line, the worse the 'food and hospital succour' became. He thought that this linkage was crucial because the sick would always recover more slowly on food deficient in quantity and/or quality.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ AWM 30: B5.53.

CHAPTER 4

LIFE IN THE LAGERS

The impact of captivity

While Statements taken from Australian POWs shortly after their return from the camps generally revealed little of the impact of captivity, some of those who left the camps during the war were aware that others were not coping well.¹

For three months from June 1917, a 48th Bn captain was at a 'strafe' or punishment camp where conditions were 'very bad indeed'. He noticed that a number of officers were getting melancholy and 'I should say many were "queer and quiet", although not actually insane.' A lance-corporal who spent his time 'devouring books and studying French' noted that, in spite of his eagerness to study and 'desire to kill time, his mind would wander and tend to become morbid. He was bored almost to distraction by the intense monotony of POW life.'²

Most of the studies that have been done on the impact of captivity were on men captured during the Second World War and in subsequent conflicts. In 1919, Dr AL Vischer, a Swiss doctor, published a short 'psychological' study of POWs. He was a departmental surgeon who for 'a long time' had worked in prison camps of various countries and talked to 'hundreds' of prisoners. Because he had come to many of them personally, he had an insight into 'the life and doings' of the camps. Vance suggested that Vischer was the first person to study the psychological condition or neurosis known as 'barbed wire disease'.³

He stated that mental disorders, some of which lay dormant previously, were very common in prisons but that particular features of POW life differentiated it from jails. He believed that 'the barbed wire winds like a red thread' through POWs'

¹ The prime purpose of the major source of material for this Study, AWM 30 Statements, was not to give details of life in captivity, but to provide operational information. See Appendix 1 to the Note on Sources and Numbers below.

² AWM 30: B10.13, Capt JE Mott. Treatment at 'strafe' camps was very harsh. L/Cpl GWD Bell (16th Bn): Mitchell Library Mss 893, pp 72, 86. He had been badly wounded at Bullecourt and did not work.

³ AL Vischer: 'Barbed Wire Disease: A Psychological Study of the Prisoner of War', translated by the author (John Bale, Sons & Danielsson, Ltd, London, 1919), p 24. Jonathan F Vance (ed): 'Encyclopaedia of Prisoners of War and Internment' (ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, 2000), p 20. The term was used in The Hague Agreement of 1917 between Germany and Britain.

mental processes, putting them on the defensive, causing them to pine and complain against the camp authorities and the routine, and against their friends and relations.⁴

Vischer saw POW camps as places where a number of mainly healthy young men were detained under guard with a range of restrictions. Because they could not know how long they would spend behind wire, POWs were different to other groups of prisoners. They were confined in limited spaces, compelled to obey rules imposed on them, given monotonous and scanty food, separated from their families and with their limited correspondence censored. Always in the same company, with no privacy and no opportunities for solitude, they waited for news from home.⁵

Although there were degrees of seriousness, Vischer believed that very few men in camps for over six months were quite free from something that was recognised by the French, the Germans and the British, although they used different names. The symptoms of the neurosis included increased irritability, quarrelsome tendencies, difficulty in concentrating, restlessness, a poor memory, a pessimistic and dismal outlook, sleeplessness and nightmares.⁶

Ill-treatment seemed to have little to do with its onset: civilian internees in relatively comfortable camps had the same incidence as those in brutal work camps. Poor camp conditions over a long period were more likely, however, to cause mental and physical problems than specific incidents of mistreatment. While the severity of the disease varied, it did not end with captivity and might never leave an individual.⁷

That POWs were affected by captivity was recognised in an agreement between the British and the German Governments at The Hague in July 1917. Paragraph 4 provided that those who had been POWs for at least 18 months, and were suffering from 'barbed wire disease', would be recognised as suitable for internment in a neutral country. If, after internment for three months, a considerable improvement in health was not observable, the disease would be treated as serious and the prisoner would be entitled to be considered for repatriation, as allowed by paragraph 8 of the Agreement. Some men left Germany earlier than others, perhaps reducing the effects of this condition.⁸

⁴ Vischer, pp 25, 31-32. Internees in neutral countries for an indefinite period, with very little to do, could also be susceptible. According to Sgt R Batteram (31st Bn; AWM 30 , B16.7), Pte RW Ingham (21st Bn) needed to be repatriated: he was 'moping' at Rougemont in Switzerland.

⁵ Vischer, pp 27, 30-31.

⁶ *ibid*, pp 53, 52, 50-52.

⁷ Vance, pp 22, 243.

⁸ See AWM 38 3DRL 6673 Item 216 for a copy of this Agreement, where the term was used.

It is ironic that, however uncongenial the task, regular work seemed to be one of the best defences against this condition. Provided conditions were congenial, it was 'a very acceptable alternative' to confinement in a camp. Work on farms, in particular, was important, providing 'real therapy for the ills of captivity'. It has been suggested that work might have saved lives and sanity of many, for it called for strength of character and intellect to be confined and inactive.⁹

Camps in Germany

Accounts by former POWs generally included little detail on daily life in the camps. These Statements were submitted soon after they reached the UK and, in their new freedom, many men may not have wished to dwell on their experiences in Germany.

By the end of the war, Germany had over 160 primary or 'parent' camps: at least 75 for officers and about 90 for ORs. In addition, there were 'numerous' working camps, or 'commandos', administratively connected to one of the parent camps. The overall administration of camps was decentralised and awkward: Germany was divided into 21 military districts, corresponding to an army corps region. Parts of the federation, such as the Bavarians and the Saxons, also controlled their own armies. Corps commanders served as military governors of their districts and they, not the central Ministry of War, administered and supervised POW camps in their district.¹⁰

The map accompanying this Study shows the large number of camps set up in Germany, and those where men of the AIF were held. While many unwounded ORs were sent out to work, the camp to which they were sent continued to be their base where, for example, their Red Cross parcels were sent.¹¹

Prisoners were sent back to camps in Germany in areas administered by the corps that had captured them. Corps commanders exercised 'an impressive autonomy', selecting sites for camps, tendering for food and building materials and choosing commandants and guards. One of the consequences of this decentralised

⁹ Pat Reid and Maurice Michael: 'Prisoner of War' (Hamlyn, London, 1984), pp 147, 156; Richard Garrett: 'POW' (David & Charles, London, 1981), p 111. See Chapter 5 for work for POWs.

¹⁰ Richard B Speed III: 'Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War: A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity' (Greenwood Press, New York, 1990), pp 75-76. Desmond Morton: 'Silent Battle: Canadian Prisoners of War in Germany, 1914-1919' (Lester Publishing, Toronto, 1992), p 16.

¹¹ There were hospitals at many lagers.

arrangement was the Berlin Government's difficulty in enforcing the various standards it had committed itself to maintain.¹²

Another consequence was the wide variation in the atmosphere in the camps. While conditions differed considerably for both ORs and officers, at 'strafe' or punishment camps, life was designed to be harsh. In other places, neglect and climate and, for ORs, work, could play their part. German personnel took their cues for the treatment of prisoners from the Commandant: it was supposed to be possible to tell about a camp from meeting that man. If Vischer's thesis about 'barbed wire disease' was valid, even if conditions were benign, POWs were subject to neuroses.¹³

Officers did not have to work. Differences in the experiences of officers and ORs were reflected in their Statements and in later publications. While ORs necessarily focussed on food and work, they were also able to organise entertainment. It seems that officers moved frequently; a range of cultural and educational activities occupied some, while others sought to escape. At some camps, an unusual number of vaccinations and inoculations were given.

After heavy losses at Bullecourt, at least one battalion decided to open a fund 'to enable a regular supply of foodstuffs, etc' to be sent to its captured men. Money was collected from all ranks each payday and sent to the (British) Red Cross to be administered. By the war's end, nearly \$2500 had been collected. The surplus was used to pay any POWs' debts to the Red Cross, and the amount remaining was donated to the Society's funds. The generosity of their comrades was appreciated by the prisoners.¹⁴

ORs' lagers

Once they arrived in Germany, treatment of ORs in lagers varied considerably. Unwounded ORs, including many NCOs, had to work: after a period in a lager, they were usually sent out on commandos.¹⁵

¹² Morton, p 16; Speed, p 76. Robert T Foley: 'German Strategy and the Path to Verdun: Erich von Falkenhayn and the Development of Attrition, 1870-1916' (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005), pp 64, 84-85.

¹³ Daniel J McCarthy: 'The Prisoner of War in Germany' (Skeffington & Son, London, 1938), p 20. Based on personal experiences of visiting camps in 1916, this book was published in 1918 after the US had entered the war: p iii. Speed, p 76, Morton, pp 17, 20.

¹⁴ Capt C Longmore: 'The Old 16th' (History Committee, Battalion Association, Perth, 1929), Appendix 1, pp 201-202.

¹⁵ See Chapter 5 for the provisions of The Hague Convention (1907) relating to POWs and work.

Understandably, most men preferred work in the lagers. Some worked in parcels offices for many months and found that, if they did their work, they were well treated and left alone. For one man, Erfurt was the best lager that he experienced: the food was ‘fair’ and, because the commandant was ‘not rough’, overall treatment was good. The experience of another was quite different: he was sent to Dulmen and given ‘practically no food’ while he worked around the camp.¹⁶

German newspapers, available in some lagers, included brief mentions of Allied successes. When they were checked with newly-captured men, it was not surprising that many stories were found wanting. At Altdam, the German flag was flown high above the Commandant’s office, but only when the news was good.¹⁷

At Dulmen, when the prisoners were not being ‘strafed’, theatrical performances were arranged on Saturday nights. Later, at Munster, the same man noted that there was a ‘fair’ library, and that there were weekly concerts or pictures. The papers of one Australian held at Schneidemuhl lager included copies of programs from performances and signed photographs of performers, some in female costumes. A group of ORs sent to a special camp near Berlin seem to have seen films quite often.¹⁸

At Altdam, British NCOs who were exempt from work collected sufficient money to build ‘a small improvised theatre’. They were allowed to buy timber and musical instruments; the concerts that were arranged were always crowded and the entrance fee was used to improve the building and buy more instruments. French POWs were able to find suitable clothing and makeup for female characters.¹⁹

Davies’ story

A narrative by a junior NCO gave a detailed picture of daily life in two lagers. L/Cpl LR Davies (13th Bn) arrived at a lager in September 1917, after working behind the lines for five months. There were many POWs in this camp, with many others away on commando in various locations, some ‘as far away as Russia’. Inside the main entrance, but outside the inner wire, he was searched, his boots were taken, and he was given wooden clogs. Taken into the camp proper, he and his companions were

¹⁶ AWM 30: B16.31, Spr HAT Williams, 2nd ATC; B16.20, L/Cpl AB Mason, 14th Fd Coy; B14.1, Pte W Quinn, 53rd Bn; B16.19, Dvr S Thomas, 8th Fd Coy; B5.33, Pte VT Lodge, 10th Bn.

¹⁷ L/Cpl GWD Bell (16th Bn): Mitchell Library Mss 893, p 78.

¹⁸ Pte LH Barry (1st Fd Coy Engrs): Mitchell Library Mss 695, pp 9, 36; Pte JA Giles (53rd Bn): Mitchell Library Mss 1842. See below for conditions at Wunsdorf-bei-Zossen.

¹⁹ Bell, pp 69-70, 74.

allocated quarters. There they were probably given more food than they needed: their new comrades were 'moved by our physical appearance.'²⁰

From their arrival at this camp, his group made it clear that they intended to carry on the fight. While they acknowledged the status of NCOs, the Germans tried to get them to work; while Davies was at Friedrichsfeld, they were not very successful.²¹

The camp was well organised and discipline strict. Reveille was at 6am and lights out at 9pm. Roll calls, or 'appels' were held three times per day, the first at 7.30am, followed by baths and gifts of boots and clothing for the new arrivals on their first full day. At certain times of the day, the barracks were cleaned and inspected and, although smoking was not permitted inside, this rule was often broken. Sunday was rest day 'to a certain degree', and voluntary church services were held in special huts.²²

Concert parties and films were arranged 'a couple of nights a week'. Stock at the canteen was limited to some kitchen items, Russian cigarettes, matches, boot laces and polish and mysterious cubed soup tablets. A Help Committee managed the distribution of parcels and other goods. The contents of parcels could be drawn twice per day by presenting a ticket. Food was emptied into containers brought by the prisoner; the Germans retained the tins, principally to prohibit stock-piling.²³

While kitchens were provided for cooking rations, men pooled food to cook it on hotplates and these 'schools' enabled new-comers to be absorbed until their parcels began to arrive after about six weeks. Davies' weight increased from about 47 to over 63 kilograms after three months in Germany. He noted that Russian POWs were given Army biscuits and condensed milk by the BRC, but not nearly enough for their numbers and condition.²⁴

In December 1917, Davies went to Parchim where there were few other POWs. They were paraded, counted, allotted to barracks and issued with bedding, but the good lighting, bunks, lockers and tables to which they were used were not provided. At 6am next day, the Germans tried to get the new men out of bed. Apart from three roll calls per day, there was little to do and the weather was cold.²⁵

²⁰ AWM, PRO0140, pp 50, 49. Most of Davies' Narrative dealt with his capture and work behind the lines; he did not provide a Statement.

²¹ *ibid*, p 56.

²² *ibid*, pp 50-51. These boots probably came in Red Cross parcels.

²³ Davies, pp 51, 54.

²⁴ *ibid*, pp 54, 56, 54-55.

²⁵ *ibid*, p 58.

A trip outside the wire to gather firewood caused trouble. The Germans provided picks and shovels, expecting the POWs to clear the ground of stumps. A compromise was reached whereby there would be more trips, rather than collecting large loads of wood at a time. The time was whiled away, reading books and playing such games as ludo as were available. While the AIF accepted that 'Britishers' on the staff had had their hard times, they noted these men had 'scored congenial jobs' and wanted to remain in favour with the Germans.²⁶

Views of senior NCOs

Two more senior NCOs gave their views on life in the lagers. Although there were petty punishments, such as moving everything outside to be searched regardless of the weather, one said that the Germans did not interfere unduly with the POWs at Diepholz lager. The other was on parade at Bohmte, a notorious camp for NCOs, when the Commandant drew his sword and chased men in and out of the barracks.²⁷

Later in the war, even getting into a lager could be difficult. S/Sgt A Webb's party arrived at a camp in March 1918 and, for three days, the treatment was 'cruel'. They were paraded 'many times' per day and made to stand in the snow, waiting for an intelligence officer who never arrived. On the third morning, they were stripped and made to stand on the cold cement floor in a bathroom for an hour before they were bathed and disinfected. Only then were they sent to barracks.²⁸

Indigenous Australian POWs

Although nominally unable to leave Australia without permission, some hundreds of Indigenous Australians served in the AIF. Several were killed, some received decorations and a number were captured. Compared with some of their AIF comrades, two such POWs were well treated by the Germans.²⁹

In October 1918, the AIF Representative in Holland wrote to the POW section in the War Office about Pte D Grant (13th Bn) and Pte RW Carter (50th Bn). They were with 'Indians' in a camp at Wunsdorf-bei-Zossen, near Berlin, where the Germans were pilfering Red Cross parcels and the men needed clothes. The War

²⁶ *ibid*, p 59. Davies' Narrative ended at this point.

²⁷ AWM 30: B6.3(1), Sgt AG Purdon, 26th Bn; B6.11(1), Sgt W Chappell, 28th Bn.

²⁸ AWM 30: B17.1. Webb was a member of the AN&MEF, not the AIF.

²⁹ The National Archives of Australia has prepared a partial list of Indigenous Australians, drawn from Service Records. 'Aborigines in the First AIF', by CD Clark in *Army Journal*, No 286, March 1973, pp 21-26. See p 23 for the reference to Indigenous POWs.

Office was asked to put pressure on the Germans to move the two to a camp where there were other Australians. The reply stated that there were 27 British POWs at Zossen in addition to the Australians, and it did not 'seem possible' to request the transfer of the two men to another camp.³⁰

This was one of two camps established to segregate POWs by nationality to exploit their ethnicity for military and political advantages. It held some 3400 prisoners, primarily Muslims and Hindus. Morton suggested that integrating black and white prisoners 'exceeded the German's own racial sensibilities.'³¹

Other Indigenous Australians were also captured, including Ptes Archibald Johnston (35th Bn) and William Williams (45th Bn).³²

Neither Grant nor Carter submitted Statements, but something is known of both men. Grant was born about 1885 in Queensland and adopted when about a year old by Mr Robert Grant of Sydney Museum. Educated at Scotch College, he became a mechanical draughtsman. He enlisted in January 1916, was refused permission to leave Australia at the last moment but left in August. Captured at Bullecourt, he had been at two other camps before arriving at Zossen. By May 1918, he was Secretary to the British Help Committee, a job that gave him 'much work both clerical and administrative'.³³

He was small, dark and spoke with a Scottish accent, such an unmistakable figure that escape was unlikely. He was given comparative freedom and, as an object of curiosity, German doctors measured and photographed his skull; scientists and anthropologists invited him to Berlin University. His bust was modelled in ebony.³⁴

³⁰ See AWM 18, Item 9982/4/4, 1 and 4 October 1918. See the entry for Grant in ADB, Vol 9, 1891-1939, Gil-Las, pp 76-77. He was 'the popular aboriginal' in Thomas A White: 'The History of the Thirteenth Battalion, AIF' (Tyrrells Ltd, Sydney, 1924), p 97. A number of Statements referred to him; see also the memoir by Pte RT Ayres (13th Bn): AWM PR89/136. For simplicity, this camp will be called 'Zossen'.

³¹ Speed, p 66. The other camp, Limburg, was where Sir Roger Casement sought in 1915 to recruit Irish POWs for the Germans. In May 1917, the Germans advised the Red Cross that Carter was there. Morton, p 47.

³² Clark, p 23, had 'Johnson'. Johnston and Williams do not seem to have gone to Zossen: RC W 1450410/POW Box 105 and RC W 2961007 respectively. Pte SCR Noell (51st Bn) referred to 'a half caste from Queensland' at Grafenwohr (AWM 30: B11.3).

³³ ADB, p 76; RC POW Box 79. Grant had only joined 13th Bn on 12 February 1917. Mitchell Library Mss 2766 contains Grant's Help Committee papers from Zossen, kept in meticulous order.

³⁴ Clark, p 24.

Grant asked the ARCS for books: Adam Lindsay Gordon, Lawson and RL Stevenson, 'or some books of Australian life' to pass away a few leisure moments 'generally filled with that longing for Home sweet Home far across the sea'.³⁵

Carter came from Point McLeay in South Australia. Captured in early April 1917, by the end of September 1917 he was at Zerbst and not 'in the best of health': his wounds had 'broken out again'. He was receiving good treatment and hoped to be better again soon. Before arriving at Zossen, he had been at three other lagers.³⁶

He continued to receive good treatment from the Germans. 'All the Native prisoners of war' went to the 'Moving pictures'; Carter said how much he had enjoyed them. He was a Congregationalist and had been a member of the Christian Endeavour Society in Adelaide. His religion was important to him and he said that church was arranged 'every other Sunday': 'I like it very much'. The AIF at Zossen were receiving parcels, and he asked the ARCS to provide him with a particular hymn book, as well as 'books by Rider Hagerts' (*sic*), Philip Oppenheim and the Captain Kettle series.

Zossen was seen as 'the model camp' in Germany where the 'Oriental was given exceptional and favourable treatment.' The barracks were well-constructed, 'roomy' and clean, and it included a special and very ornate mosque. Cooking and bathing arrangements made provision for different religious rites and tastes; because of past service, German officers understood the languages of different groups.³⁷

Men seem to have been treated 'humanely'. There was plenty of food, including rice and wheat flour not usually found in Germany. This 'exceptionally good impression' was marred when it became clear that much of this special food came through channels such as the Young Men's Christian Association. According to McCarthy, as many as 2000 men were sent from Zossen to Turkey.³⁸

In letters to the ARCS, Grant and Carter stated with seeming pride that they were Indigenous Australians. Carter was able to say that boots sent to him were too small, and received an apology for the error. The Hon Secretary of the ARCS wrote to

³⁵ RC POW Box 79.

³⁶ RC POW Box 33. Carter enlisted in July 1915 and joined 10th Bn in November 1915, after it had left Gallipoli. He was transferred to 50th Bn when it was formed in February 1916.

³⁷ McCarthy, p 89. Morton stated (p 47) that the mosque was built at the Kaiser's command, 'doubtless as a timely gesture to his Turkish allies.'

³⁸ *ibid*, p 90. Presumably, these men fought the Allies.

Grant in her direct manner, noting that he was an old Scotch College boy and making reference to his race.³⁹

Officers' camps

While the treatment varied, officers did not work; they also had more food. One officer believed that decent treatment reduced the number of escapes. While many concentrated on planning to escape, others did not mention the subject: even allowing for the number of wounded officers, only a small number of the Sample tried to escape and only one was successful. Nevertheless, the Statements showed officers engaged in a range of activities, including walking on parole outside some camps.⁴⁰

For the first few weeks one officer was at a camp in 1916-1917, local merchants would come twice-weekly to the reading room and sell books, fancy goods, musical instruments and boots. This was stopped by order from Berlin. Both French and Russian prisoners had rooms as churches. The canteen sold wine, beer, mineral water and dry goods; the four billiard tables were provided from canteen profits.⁴¹

Two or three times per week, 'British' officers were able to walk for two or three hours on parole outside the camp. There were two roll calls per day, and POWs could remain in the grounds until dusk. This camp was very strongly guarded and there were no escapes and, as it was not a 'strafe' camp, the Germans were 'almost always courteous'.

This officer believed that Clausthal was a 'strafe' camp, staffed by officers with a dislike of England. Short of physical violence, they did all they could to make life unpleasant: the 15 cells were always full, with a permanent waiting list, for minor offences such as being improperly dressed on parade, failing to salute, being found in a corridor after 9pm. A major-general received eight days' cells for telling the Commandant that the frequent collective punishments were unfair. These included stoppages of walks, lighting, letters and admission to the recreation ground. Appels, inside and out, could be called at any hour and, although it was cold for seven months of the year, only the dining room was heated in the main building.⁴²

Searches of persons and belongings were 'frequent and aggressive'. Sentries had orders to shoot at any officer entering forbidden areas, such as the flower beds,

³⁹ RC POW, Boxes 33 and 79.

⁴⁰ 3DRL/4043: Capt JH Honeysett (47th Bn), pp 209, 246. See Chapter 6 for escapes.

⁴¹ AWM 30: B16.7, Capt C Mills, 31st Bn.

⁴² Mills was at Clausthal from mid-April to the end of September 1917.

and there were no successful escapes. While a Dutch Embassy official spent a day in June 1917 noting complaints, there were no apparent benefits.

Three AFC officers at Landshut in 1918 referred to numbers of inoculations and vaccinations. One was there for five weeks in March and was inoculated four times and vaccinated once. Another was there for five weeks in June/July and was inoculated five times and vaccinated once, while the third, in October, received six inoculations in ten days. No reasons seem to have been given for any of these procedures.⁴³

Sanders' story

The experiences of Lt RE Sanders (14th Bn/4th ALTM Bty) were not the same as some other officers: somewhat paradoxically, he began to try to escape as soon as he could but stayed in Germany after the Armistice. Orderlies did the work at Karlsruhe and time passed slowly for the captives. They were left alone, apart from 'shouting exhibitions and showing off' and a check after 'lights out' at 10pm. The supply of food was a constant preoccupation but, until they began to receive Red Cross parcels, rations were supplemented from a reserve. There was also a canteen where cigarettes, some food and other goods were available.⁴⁴

With a party of about 50 others, he was sent to Crefeld near the Dutch border: this was 'one of the best' camps in Germany. It had a library of 'over ten thousand English books' on a wide range of subjects and, through the BRCS, a variety of educational programs were underway. The POWs had built themselves courts for tennis and 'fives'; the barrack square was large enough for cricket, football and hockey.⁴⁵

Professional and amateur actors staged popular plays and revues, charging admission in the only currency allowed in the camp, 'lager geld'. There were two roll calls per day, for which the POWs fell into squads in the square. Officers prepared their food in a large kitchen where orderlies also cooked the rations provided.⁴⁶

⁴³ AWM 30: B3.12, Lt WB Randell, 4 Sqn, AFC; B3.11, Lt AR Rackett, 2 Sqn AFC; B3.5, Lt G Cox, 2 Sqn AFC. At Dulmen, in September 1917, two 2nd ATC NCOs were inoculated and vaccinated several times (AWM 30, B6.13(1)). In May 1918, Pte J Stinson (20th Bn) was at Munster for about four weeks and was inoculated four times and vaccinated once: AWM 30: B6.13(2). Some of the Canadians were also 'jabbed' many times and, perhaps as a result of propaganda, insisted that they had been infected with 'nameless but dread diseases': Morton, p 43.

⁴⁴ AWM 2DRL/0417, pp 5, 7, 6.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, pp 11, 13.

⁴⁶ *ibid*, pp 13, 15.

After only a fortnight, Sanders was one of about 400 officers sent to Schwarmstedt, about 200 kilometres from the Dutch border. He made a number of attempts to escape and, after serving 28 days in 'cells', was then sent to Strohenmoor. While this was a 'strafe' camp, it was close to the Dutch frontier and there were many more 'escape enthusiasts'. Later, he was sent to Neunkirchen for a few weeks where, on the first morning, the Germans attempted to rouse the prisoners at 6.30am for an 8am roll call.⁴⁷

Sanders then moved the short distance to Saarlouis for ten months. Escape was considered to be impossible, so he learnt German and took part in the amateur theatricals that greatly delighted the Germans. If parole was given, it was possible to go for escorted walks outside the camp. When parcels began to arrive, guards were shocked by the quantity and variety of food these contained: they had believed propaganda about the effectiveness of the submarine campaign. When influenza broke out in the nearby town and spread to the camp; a number of the POWs caught it but did not die, as did some of the Germans.⁴⁸

In the early stages of the offensive that began on the Western Front in March 1918, the Germans gloated that they would soon be in Paris. By the end of April, they were very subdued. In August, many guards previously too young for service in the front line were sent there. German-speaking POWs 'did not ease their heavy spirits' by telling them they were 'only gun fodder', and by giving instructions on how to surrender.⁴⁹

On 6 November 1918, about 170 officers were moved north-east to Coblenz, where 'a revolution had broken out'. Under instructions from the Workers' and Soldiers' Council, a guard escorted them to the camp. They were not able to celebrate the Armistice because their credits in camp money had not been transferred. On 12 November, Sanders sold 50 pieces of soap to a hairdresser at 6 marks or 5 shillings per piece and a celebration was possible.⁵⁰

Under the terms of the Armistice, POWs were to be repatriated as soon as possible, but the Workers' and Soldiers' Council advised them to remain in the camp 'for a few days', as Coblenz was 'full of German troops that had deserted from their units. Through the Council, a train was chartered to take POWs to Holland and the

⁴⁷ *ibid*, pp 29, 39-40.

⁴⁸ *ibid*, pp 42, 55, 47.

⁴⁹ *ibid*, pp 47, 48, 51.

⁵⁰ *ibid*, pp 53-54.

UK. Sanders volunteered to remain and established a Red Cross Relief Depot for freed Allied POWs.⁵¹

Leisure

In addition to such activities as theatrical productions and walks, in some camps otherwise empty hours were filled by gambling. Honeysett believed that POWs could not be blamed as there was little else to do between escapes and attempted escapes.⁵²

In the midst of his accounts of planning to escape, the attempts and various dealings with 'the Hun', he referred to the 'tremendous' amount of gambling that went on 'in every prison camp'. Poker was 'easily the prime favourite, but others such as solo whist, roulette, boule, baccarat, vingt-et-un and 'race games' were also popular. Even ludo was popular for about a week after a 'huge parcel' of sets was provided by the Dutch Red Cross.

As the only money within the camp was a limited amount of 'lager geld', cheques were written on whatever 'any old piece of paper', to be honoured at the end of the war. Some prisoners gambled beyond their means and inevitably some cheques were dishonoured. Honeysett won about \$600 in the camps, mostly playing poker.⁵³

Bad treatment

Honeysett noted that, in comparison with a 'strafe' camp like Strohenmoor, conditions at Clausthal made it 'home from home': prisoners there were more contented than at other camps he 'visited'. The ration was edible and, with parcels, only those 'inhabiting a cell' were hungry. The natural surroundings were beautiful; the outer compound contained a miniature golf course, a tennis court and a squash court.⁵⁴

The treatment he received at Clausthal was 'very bad', and he later gave evidence before a Commission of Inquiry into the treatment of POWs. There were 'repeated occasions' of unjust treatment by the Commandant, Capt ('Mad Harry') Niemeyer. Honeysett was 'severely bitten' by a savage prison dog and, after he was

⁵¹ *ibid*, pp 51-52, 54, 62. Events at Coblenz have been included here because the officers were still nominally confined. See Chapter 9 for Sanders' experiences after the Armistice.

⁵² AWM 3DRL/4043, pp 209, 202. Honeysett was at Clausthal from February 1918 until a month after the Armistice.

⁵³ *ibid*, pp 206-209 (*passim*), 54. It was not clear whether his winnings reflected 1918 or 1930 values.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, pp 209, 202, 225.

‘grossly assaulted’ by another German officer, he wrote to the War Office in Berlin but received no satisfaction.⁵⁵

Depending on the commandant, officers could not escape humiliation and petty punishments. A 19th Bn officer related how at Holzminden (the other) Capt Niemeyer seemed to delight in stripping officers in front of the guard and, while they were naked, passing ‘disgusting remarks’ about them. It was common to be turned out of bed at bayonet point. At Clausthal, officers were repeatedly sent to the cells for imaginary offences. From May to June 1918, the camp was subjected to collective punishment ‘in every possible way’, allegedly because German officers were being badly treated in the UK.⁵⁶

When two officers escaped from a camp, the rest were locked in their rooms for three days, with reduced rations and no smoking. A ‘general inspection’, on a tip from an Italian officer, found a hole for a tunnel. The three officers involved were taken to prison and for six days they were not allowed to smoke, given little to eat, no exercise, no privacy or parcels. In all, they were held in these conditions for 11 days.⁵⁷

Conclusions

What was written about life in the First World War lagers was a foretaste of accounts from a later war. The differences between Statements were revealing: ORs were concerned about work and food, although at some lagers theatrical performances were arranged. While there were more references to sporting, cultural and educational pursuits in officers’ Statements and in their limited number of memoirs, there were also considerable differences between ‘strafe’ camps and others.

If commandants were like the Niemeyers, even in ‘normal’ conditions, life for officers could be difficult without reprisals for escapes or eccentric behaviour by German officers. If Honeysett is to be believed, some officers spent time gambling and on amateur theatrical productions. Others worked obsessively to escape, and did

⁵⁵ AWM 30: B10.10; AWM 3DRL/4043, pp 209, 257. The Niemeyer twins were commandants at Strohenmoor, Holzminden and Clausthal. Honeysett was at these lagers for varying times.

⁵⁶ AWM 30: B6.10(2), Lt HC Fitzgerald. He was at Holzminden for three and a half months between attempts to escape: see Chapter 6. See OH Vol IV, p 343, fn 189, for a reference to ‘the notorious Niemeyer’ at Holzminden.

⁵⁷ AWM 30: B3.6, 2/Lt OT Flight, 2 Sqn AFC. The Italian who betrayed the intended escape was discovered.

their time in the cells for unsuccessful attempts. As Honeysett spent a great deal of time on escapes, perhaps he was biased against those who did not share his views.

A few men were subjected to numbers of inoculations or vaccinations. Those that mentioned this matter in their Statements could have reflected a German obsession with preventing infection in some camps.

Although he did not give many details of the means, one of the interesting features of Sanders' memoir was the number of times that he moved camps in Germany. It is hard to see why it was important to move 170 officers to Coblenz on 6 November 1918.

Because of the good conditions there, the experiences of two captured Indigenous Australians at Zossen seem to have been different to those of many of their comrades. The War Office was not concerned about their situation, AIF HQ was not prepared to raise the matter again, and the Armistice was signed a few weeks later. Grant and Carter were well treated but, although the Germans may have been successful with POWs of other nationalities, it was not clear how much effort was put into subverting the loyalties of these Australians.

CHAPTER 5

WORK

Work was an important issue for many AIF ORs, especially NCOs, and there were considerable differences in the treatment that they received. Some men were able to remain in the camps and, as life in them was considered 'devine' (*sic*), this was preferable to selection for a 'commando': being sent out to work in a factory or, worse still, to a mine or quarry where treatment could be particularly harsh. Some were sent to farms where, in most cases, they were treated well. Others volunteered for commandos in the hope of better food, or because escaping was easier than from lagers.¹

International agreements

During the First World War, Article VI of the Annex to The Hague Convention of 1907 was the only guidance about work for POWs. In part, it stated that:

The State may utilise the labour of prisoners of war according to their rank and capacity, officers excepted. The tasks shall not be excessive, and shall have no connection with the operations of war.

Prisoners may be authorised to work for the public service, for private persons, or on their own account.

Work done for the State is paid for at the rates in force for the work of a similar kind done by soldiers of the national army, or, if there are none in force, at a rate according to the work executed.²

Before 1914, such general statements may have been sufficient to protect POWs from their captors. During the war, Germany was increasingly short of labour and took advantage of the supply in POW camps. The Convention was never going to protect prisoners, and Statements showed frequent abuse of both its letter and spirit. Most importantly, it specified that officers did not have to work. This caused many problems, especially for the more senior NCOs.

¹ L/Cpl GWD Bell (16th Bn): Mitchell Library Mss 893, p 73. Badly wounded in the leg at Bullecourt, he was not able to work.

² Chapter 1, Section 1. See the Introduction for information on this Convention.

In July 1918, the German and British Governments signed a bilateral agreement at The Hague. Article XXVIII amplified and strengthened the provision from the 1907 Convention: POWs ‘may not be compelled to do any work which is directly connected with the operations of war.’ Among other provisions, Article XXXII attempted to regulate the hours of work and meal breaks, and Article XXXIII to restrict work in mines and quarries to those fit for it. It also specified medical examinations before this work, repeated monthly, and removal from such places if required. Those working in mines and quarries were to work on the same basis as ‘free’ workers and were also entitled to their increased rations.³

This Agreement also provided that neither country would set up camps nor set prisoners to work within 30 kilometres of the firing line.⁴

Germany’s need for labour

Charlotte Carr-Gregg noted that the modernisation of European armed forces before 1914 had involved enlargement of the industrial complex connected to the war efforts of combatants. It had also led to the intensification of the exploitation of raw material, for which skilled labour was required. Indiscriminate recruitment early in the war soon exhausted this limited resource, causing problems for all the belligerents. Fighting troops had to be provided at the same time as the ever-growing needs of industry had to be met.⁵

In Germany, given industry’s ever-increasing demands, shortages of labour and food, as well as a wide range of other items, it is not surprising that large numbers of Allied POWs were put into service: first in agriculture, then in the mines and on munitions work. They played an important role in sustaining Germany’s war effort. The map accompanying this Study shows the large number of camps set up in Germany, used as bases for commandos.⁶

In previous conflicts, holding substantial numbers of prisoners was a means of weakening the enemy’s ability to make war, by reducing his numbers or demanding

³ Agreement between the British and German Governments concerning Combatant Prisoners of War and Civilians, in *British and Foreign State Papers 1917-1918*, Vol CXI, pp 279-310. The first such agreement, relating to the internment and exchange of POWs, had been signed at The Hague in July 1917: see Chapter 8.

⁴ *ibid*, Article XXXVIII. See Richard B Speed III, ‘Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War: A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity’ (Greenwood Press, New York, 1990), p 39.

⁵ Charlotte Carr-Gregg: ‘The Impact of War on Society as reflected in the Status and Treatment of Prisoners of War’. Unpublished PhD thesis, UNSW, 1977, pp 456-457.

⁶ *ibid*, p 459.

ransoms. From 1914, OR POWs provided a cheap, mobile work force, one that would not receive the same wages as German workers, elaborate housing, or even adequate food: parcels from various sources would give Allied POWs the bulk of their nourishment. Even if they had to produce arms or munitions, POWs refused to work at their peril; Carr-Gregg suggested that such employment introduced the notion of slavery into their treatment.⁷

In addition to the needs of industry, a great deal of labour was required in the areas immediately behind the Front Line.

In such a military-industrial situation, it was unlikely that the provisions of The Hague Convention would be invoked, let alone used. Moral considerations, and international legal obligations, were blatantly ignored to satisfy Germany's ever-increasing demand for more men, arms and munitions. This was especially so after the Army took over direction of the national economy, and the allocation of labour, from December 1916.⁸

Working parties behind the German lines

The first experience of working for the Germans for many of the unwounded AIF came soon after their capture. In April 1917, after spending time in an old French fort at Lille, some captured Australians became Prisoners of Respite (POR) immediately behind the lines. This means of retaliating against alleged ill-treatment of German POWs lasted until July 1917, when the two Governments reached an agreement for the withdrawal of the prisoners to an agreed distance. This agreement and the one negotiated at The Hague in July 1918 were not particularly effective, as many of the AIF continued to be sent to, and remain on, such working parties.⁹

While these men worked behind the lines, according to information provided to the Red Cross, they were in a camp at Limburg. Apart from starvation and overwork, the most important result of this deception was that they could not receive the three parcels sent each fortnight to all POWs, once they were traced. Such working parties could be just behind the German lines, and at risk of Allied shellfire, as was shown in the escape of two 4th MG Bn men in April 1918.¹⁰

⁷ *ibid.*, pp 457-458.

⁸ *ibid.*, pp 460, 463.

⁹ OH, Vol IV, pp 342-343, fn 189. See Chapter 2 for POR.

¹⁰ See Chapter 6 for the escape of Cpl CW Lane and Pte RC Ruschpler.

The consequences of working men hard and not feeding them well were predictable, and many were later to spend time in German hospitals. A man who saw men return from working parties noted that they were 'as good as gone.' They had been worked and starved until they were too weak to be of further use as labourers and were then sent Germany. Frost bite led to operations and amputations there, but some were too weak for anaesthesia and died.¹¹

After eight days in Fort Macdonald in April 1917, working parties of about 200 men were used for road works and building dugouts, a light railway and ammunition dumps. A 13th Bn man saw POWs roughly handled and knocked about by German guards. About half of his party of 200 were later to be sent away because of 'general debility and weakness' caused by bad and insufficient food. He did not receive any special treatment or medicine in hospital, but he was given better food.¹²

Another man, captured in April 1918, was badly treated and made to work, lifting logs and carrying heavy shells, while he had dysentery. Just before the Armistice, he was admitted to Namur hospital with general debility: POWs were 'dying like flies'.¹³

While it may have been agreed that POWs would not be used as POR from July 1917, late in 1918 men were still working behind the German lines. Following some time at Fort Macdonald, a man from 48th Bn was there, often within range of Allied artillery. He did not go to Germany, and only received 'about 40' Red Cross parcels in 20 months of captivity; those that he received were damaged and many articles were missing. He did not receive clothes or shoes as a POW, and spent ten weeks in hospital with dysentery because of bad food.¹⁴

Two men's experience demonstrated the impact of work behind the lines. After about six weeks, they escaped to AIF lines. When captured, one had weighed about 76 kilograms but was about 63.5 kilograms on his return. The other had gone from nearly 83 kilograms to 73 kilograms 'after good feeding for some weeks'.¹⁵

¹¹ AWM 30: B13.5, Pte J Thompson, 13th Bn.

¹² AWM 30: B13.5, Pte R Russell.

¹³ AWM 30: B6.7(2), Pte HL Bragg, 18th Bn.

¹⁴ AWM 30: B10.13, Pte R Russell. At three per fortnight, he should have received at least 120 parcels over 20 months.

¹⁵ AWM 30: B13.22, L/Cpl H Parsons and Pte G Stewart, 16th Bn. See Chapter 6 for their escape.

A range of experiences

While many Australians were starved, beaten and worked very hard, others reported that some experiences in Germany were good. It was suggested that small commandos of two or three men could be 'quite pleasant', provided Red Cross parcels were received regularly.¹⁶

Early in 1918, an OR volunteered for a commando and was sent to Duke Leonburg's estate with other Australians, British and Russians. While he was only there for six weeks, he had 'the time of my life'.¹⁷

From August 1918 until the Armistice, an 11th Bn private worked in a spirit and wine factory in Hamburg and, understandably, 'had a good time.' From February 1917 until the Armistice, another soldier repaired farm implements, and was treated 'fairly well'. Food on this commando was better than in the lager. He was paid 85 pfennigs per day for his work, and one of the few Australians to mention payment for work. After the Armistice, he was not forced to work but could if he wished.¹⁸

Conditions on commandos could be significantly better than in lagers. A man who was on a farm commando for seven months commented that, while medical treatment in Germany was very good, the general treatment was harsh, except on commando where POWs were 'decently treated'.¹⁹

Until he was interned in Holland, another soldier was the only Australian on a timber work commando for ten months. While the food was only 'fair', he had his parcels and so had sufficient, especially as more was supplied from the manager's house. Little wonder that he said that he had generally received good treatment and was fortunate compared with many of his companions. He said that cruel actions such as beatings were frequent in the camps, but rare on commandos: the manager of his commando would not allow unfair treatment and offenders were sent to the Front. While many of his companions would have regarded this treatment as unusual, they would not have been surprised that he believed that thefts from parcels were 'very common'.²⁰

In some cases, it was recognised that men were not fit to work. After four months in hospital, a 16th Bn man was sent to a lager and then to an officers' camp as

¹⁶ L/Cpl GWD Bell (16th Bn): Mitchell Library Mss, p 69.

¹⁷ AWM 30: B11.3, Pte J Cotter: 51st Bn.

¹⁸ AWM 30: B5.44, Pte WH Bath, 11th Bn; B6.3(1), Pte C Facer, 26th Bn. Pte AV Postle (4th MG Bn, AWM 30: B10.5) also mentioned derisory payments.

¹⁹ AWM 30: B16.11, Pte J Gradwell, 32nd Bn.

²⁰ AWM 30: B5.6, Pte AS Goodworth, 3rd Bn.

an orderly. A German under-officer saw that he was not able to do that job, so he swabbed the orderlies' barracks twice daily. When the camp closed, he was sent to another lager for eight months. Working 'outside', helping push heavy goods vans, loading and unloading ballast, because he could not lift his foot high enough he tripped over obstacles.

After a medical examination, he was marked for permanent 'sitting work' and not sent on commando. After making envelopes with others of his medical category, he was interned in Switzerland from August 1918, 'as we were no good to them for work.'²¹

In addition to receiving poor treatment, individuals could be separated from their comrades for long periods. While working at a chemical factory, a 25th Bn soldier did not see any other members of the AIF for six months. He was treated badly: it was five months before he got any clothes and he could not get a bath for eight weeks. If he refused to work, he was given the 'silly stand': facing a wall, standing to attention for hours in any weather. He was told by the Red Cross later that this was one of the worst commandos. For most of 1918, until a week after the Armistice he was well treated while making bricks.²²

Even behind the lines, and 'a couple of times' under Allied shell fire, there could be good treatment. Two men were held on working parties behind the German lines and, probably because they moved around, neither seems to have received parcels. The officer in command was 'an exceptionally good man', allowing French and Belgian civilians to supply food: they 'could not have existed' on the German ration. They were aware that they were 'more fortunate than most' on working parties.²³

Farms

Allocation to commandos was a matter of luck. For most of the AIF, working on farms was better than other experiences in Germany. One man commented that farm work was hard but that ill-treatment was not as common as in other work places. Some men who had been badly treated in the lagers, 'given several hidings' with rifles

²¹ AWM 30: B13.22, Pte H Todunter. He had been wounded in both legs at Bullecourt.

²² AWM 30: B6.1(1), Pte T Simpson, 25th Bn. This Statement can be found in the section following p 200. The 'silly stand' was a favourite way of dealing with reluctant individuals or groups of workers, and was mentioned in many accounts.

²³ AWM 30: B6.7(2), Ptes SJ Lawlis and JA Madden, 18th Bn.

and sticks or were given ‘clink’ frequently for not working, later had good experiences on farm commandos. Another said that men were not ill-treated on farms if they did their work and ‘behaved’, and noted that he was paid by the day.²⁴

A man was sent on a farm commando for ten months where the German wife of an Englishman treated him well. When the farm was sold, he refused to work for the new owners and was sent to do fatigues in a camp until the Armistice.²⁵

Some Australians referred to some farms as ‘homes from home’. An officer heard of a corporal who had received every domestic comfort at one place, ‘including the oldest daughter’.²⁶

Conditions on farms could also be grim. After working in harsh conditions behind the lines for eight months, a 15th Bn soldier was sent to a farm and brutally treated. The farmer’s wife watched and informed the farmer if she considered the POW had not done enough. He was belted with a whip; twice local gendarmes prodded him with a sword. Scars on his back, legs and arm proved the ill treatment, but he had to stay there until he ‘escaped’ back to the lager after the Armistice.²⁷

Refusal to work

It was unwise to refuse to work, or to try to limit its hours, as the response could be brutal. While none of the AIF showed that they knew of the specific prohibition in The Hague Convention about war-related work, or the agreement negotiated in July 1918 limiting hours, they were clear that they should not have been given some tasks. Confronted by uncooperative POWs, the Germans used a number of ways to get them to work, in addition to the ‘silly stand’.

Protests about any matter related to work could lead to punishment, and men could be sentenced to substantial periods in custody for refusing to work: as late as 11 November 1918, a man was given five weeks in a ‘strafe’ camp, while another served a total of 56 days ‘in prison’ for this offence.²⁸

Lesser punishments could also be inflicted. A man from 28th Bn was in an iron foundry for five months and refused the job he was given, as the iron was for use in grenades. While he did not provide details, he was then badly treated by the manager.

²⁴ L/Cpl GWD Bell (16th Bn): Mitchell Library Mss 893, p 69. AWM 30: B15.1, Pte EA Briggs, 59th Bn; B17.6, Pte D Cashmore, 22nd Bn; B11.3, L/Cpl HE Slipper, 51st Bn.

²⁵ AWM 30: B16.11, Pte JH Henry, 32nd Bn.

²⁶ AWM 3DRL/4043, p 237: Capt JH Honeysett, 47th Bn.

²⁷ AWM 30: B13.18, Pte W Green.

²⁸ AWM 30: B17.3, Pte HF Eisfelder, 21st Bn; B11.3, Pte LEW McMiles, 51st Bn.

At another iron foundry, a man refused to work because he said it was a Sunday. He was knocked down with a rifle and taken to the foundry where he was kicked by a sentry, then by the corporal in charge.²⁹

For about six weeks, another man was at a carbide factory, where the general treatment was extremely harsh. He was 'brutally assaulted' by a guard for refusing to work more than 12 hours per day.³⁰

Even under great pressure, it was possible to refuse to work. After one OR was discharged from hospital, he was sent with 600 other POWs to a sugar factory. After a few weeks, he was sent back to camp with 14 others for 'not doing enough work'. They were given three days' detention with no food and only water to drink, sent to work on a railway and then to a munitions factory. Refusing to carry shells, they were told that they would be shot; when they continued to refuse, 'a couple' of machine guns were brought up. A few blanks were fired but the Germans now knew that this group would not work, so the men were given 'cells' for a week in prison.

After an attempt to escape, he was 'heavily punished': three days on water only, four on bread and water. He was sent to a limestone quarry where the work was heavy and unhealthy and the guards were unusually harsh and brutal: 'They banged us with anything that came handy- rifle butts, bayonets, sticks, stones.' Eventually, he was hit in the head by a guard and knocked out. He was sent back to the lager with a poisoned foot and 'fits' brought on by the rough life.³¹

NCOs and work

In April 1918, AIF Admin HQ in London noted that many applications for confirmation of rank were being received from NCOs. Where there was an entitlement, confirmation was provided immediately. The AIF Representative in Switzerland was asked whether a certificate of rank should be provided for NCOs as soon as it was confirmed that they had been captured. He replied that cases 'frequently' arose when it was difficult to convince the Germans of NCO rank.

²⁹ AWM 30: B6.11(1), Pte E Armstrong, 28th Bn; B5.25, Pte EA Wilson, 8th Bn. In fact, 31 December 1917 was a Monday.

³⁰ AWM 30: B10.5, Pte MJ O'Halloran, 52nd Bn.

³¹ AWM 30: B14.1, Pte CA Mitchell. See Chapter 2 for the surrender of elements of 53rd Bn and other 5th Div units, including Mitchell, at Fromelles.

Certificates would safeguard AIF interests, and he recommended that they be forwarded in every case.³²

The Hague Convention did not exempt NCOs from work. For more senior NCOs, the Germans' determination to make as many ORs work as possible caused particular difficulties. Many sought nonetheless to assert their status when the Germans tried to make them work. In many situations, it was not advantageous to be an NCO.

A 28th Bn sergeant seems to have been held behind the lines for a time, and was then hospitalised as a result of exhaustion and the effects of a blow 'from a sentry for refusing to work.' Later he was forced to work. In July 1917, there was an order that NCOs were only to work in the Post Office distributing parcels, or cleaning barracks. Shortly after this, he became President of the camp's Help Committee, a position he held until 26 December 1918.³³

After a short time at Cambrai, for two months another sergeant was with a working party but did no work. Later, he was 'forced to work' by the interpreter, a Pte H Owen of the Middlesex Regiment, who stood over him with a fixed bayonet: the Australian did not work hard or fast. In May, he went to a tough camp where he was subjected to the 'silly stand' with other NCOs for refusing to work.³⁴

In April 1917, about 40 NCOs were marched into a field and ordered to work. They refused and were made to do the 'silly stand' for four or five hours in a snowstorm. Then they were locked up in a small area of the barracks for 11 days with little food. Suffering from cold and hunger, the party decided to work and, in the meantime, wrote to a neutral ambassador. They were given what was called 'lager work': pulling heavily laden wagons and digging in the fields.³⁵

On 15 November 1917, 'an order came through' that NCOs did not work outside the actual area of the camp. From then on, NCOs at this camp only worked on parcels or in the cookhouse.³⁶

It was possible to refuse to work outside some camps. A sergeant from 32nd Bn 'refrained from volunteering' and knew nothing about general conditions on

³² AWM 18, Item 9982/5/1: 15 April 1918, 6 May 1918.

³³ AWM 30: B6.11(1), Sgt OH Bader. While the origin of this 'order' is unclear, other NCOs were to benefit from it or another like it later in 1917.

³⁴ AWM 30: B6.11(1), Sgt W Chappell, 28th Bn.

³⁵ AWM 30: B6.3(1), Sgt AG Purdon, 26th Bn. No particular neutral ambassador was specified, and there was no mention of a reply.

³⁶ The reference to the 'order' was general but, as in Bader's case, it was accepted by the Germans.

commando. A corporal from a tunnelling company refused to work, so that he too had 'no experience' of commandos. The absence of comments in their Statements indicated that the Germans accepted this position. A corporal was lucky: for the 18 months he was in a lager he did not work, 'nor was any serious attempt made to compel me to do so.'³⁷

Self-promotion and proof of rank

Some men promoted themselves to NCO ranks to avoid work, but the consequences were not always predictable. After he had been at various lagers and employed on different works, a 19th Bn private promoted himself to corporal but overall treatment at Hameln, including the food and sleeping accommodation, was 'very bad'. Another made himself a sergeant and was then sent to a 'strafe' camp for non-working NCOs. When released from hospital, a 48th Bn soldier who had put up sergeant's stripes before he was captured was to be at a notoriously harsh camp for NCOs for most of the rest of his captivity.³⁸

The experiences of a 47th Bn lance-corporal varied. Wounded in the head at Bullecourt, he claimed he was discharged from hospital before the wound had healed. He promoted himself to corporal to avoid a commando and, when the Germans tried to make him, he refused to work outside the camp. At an NCO's camp, the feldwebel in charge 'was a good man and treated us very well.' Sent to Aachen for exchange, his correct rank was discovered, and he went back to Germany on commando: 'I cannot lodge any complaint against the treatment I received. I was suffering very much from my head and my hands were paralysed.'³⁹

Some men promoted themselves both to avoid work and to increase the chances of escaping. After his discharge from hospital, a 16th Bn soldier became a corporal 'and so dodged all work.' To assist in escaping, he then volunteered for a commando and got within about eight kilometres of Switzerland.⁴⁰

Life could be difficult for those unable initially to prove their rank. Because he had no such proof, a 10th Bn corporal was forced to work; when his rank was accepted

³⁷ AWM 30: B16.11, Sgt HR Collett, 32nd Bn; B6.13(1), Cpl MG Dunn, 2nd ATC; B13.22, Cpl CH Plank, 16th Bn.

³⁸ AWM 30: B6.10(2), Pte JF McKenzie, 19th Bn; B5.27, Pte P O'Donnell, 8th Bn; B10.13, Pte E MacKenzie, 48th Bn.

³⁹ AWM 30: B10.10, L/Cpl WD Littlewood.

⁴⁰ AWM 30: B13.22, Pte FG Best, 16th Bn.

through the intervention of the Dutch Ambassador, he was sent to a harsh camp for NCOs.⁴¹

Because he had no proof of rank, another corporal was sent on commando to a farm for ten days. As he was not 'a good enough worker', he then went to a sugar factory. His group of 'four Englishmen' made bringing in the coal too easy, so they were put on to stoking: 'a job that very nearly killed us all.' He had an argument with a German and spent his time in the stokehold with a guard watching him. Just prior to leaving the factory, when the beet was exhausted, he received proof of his rank and was sent to a lager. After a week there, he was on the parcels staff for two weeks, losing that job because he obeyed a recently published order that NCOs were not to work outside the camp. He was then sent to a 'strafe' camp.⁴²

Deception and slacking

While the Germans went to great lengths to get POWs to work, it was possible to avoid it, or to do as little as possible. Some men were able to arrange matters for their own benefit; this could be done in a number of ways. A man from 13th Bn was able to get a Canadian doctor to admit him to hospital for more than three months. Another shammed sickness until the results of a more strict medical examination saw him sent to lay railway plate. A third was sent to a coal mine, pretended to be mad and 'for fully two months' did no work; he does not seem to have been hospitalised, remaining at the mine.⁴³

Sympathetic work groups existed in Germany. A lance-corporal was on a railway maintenance commando for 15 months, working under and with German civilians, most of whom had relations who were POWs in the UK or France. The general treatment was 'not bad' but the food was very bad and scanty, and parcels were frequently delayed. His party did not have to work hard and was not expected to do much; it took care not to exceed expectations.⁴⁴

⁴¹ AWM 30: B5.33, Cpl HS Walker.

⁴² AWM 30: B16.16, Cpl WE Devenish, 5th MG Bn. This may have been the order to which Purdon referred.

⁴³ AWM 30: B13.5, Pte JW Johnston, 13th Bn; B10.20, L/Cpl JW Pitts, 50th Bn; B5.33, Pte E Gardiner, 10th Bn. See Chapter 7 for more material on the first two incidents. Gardiner's 'madness' was convenient.

⁴⁴ AWM 30: B16.11, L/Cpl W Dyke, 32nd Bn. He was the only Australian in the party.

Retaliation

Some of the AIF were able to deal with their captors. A warrant officer referred to the brutal treatment of Russian and Italian POWs and commented that because of the fear of retaliation 'British' POWs were not treated badly.⁴⁵

Two men thought that 'Australians stood the hardships better than any of the other POWs, in many cases resented the ill-treatment, and gave plenty of cheek', so that Germans always knew they were dealing with the AIF. This did not always work. On one occasion, they saw a German 'make a kick' at a soldier. He caught the foot, the German landed on his back and the 30th Bn man received ten days' 'cells' on bread and water.⁴⁶

A lance-corporal from 53rd Bn was sent on farm commandos. On one occasion, he escaped into a cellar that in turn led to a wine cellar, which he raided. While felling timber, he did more damage than work and, on farms, he caused the deaths of animals. He was sent back to camp.⁴⁷

Unfit for work

Inevitably, the Germans marked some men as fit for work before they believed that they were. In January 1917, a 5th MG Bn man reported sick but was marked for work. An under-officer 'nearly throttled' him, punched him over the temples and he was 'terribly bruised' around the neck.⁴⁸

After an appendix operation, a soldier was hospitalised for two months. He did not receive any medicine, and was looked after by a Russian orderly. Sent back to the lager with the wound 'still raw', he was marked 'fit' by a German doctor. An appeal to a Russian doctor saw him re-admitted to hospital for a further two months. On his release, he worked in the store at the lager.⁴⁹

As well as harsh treatment, there were accidents and some men deliberately hurt themselves to avoid work. Because of German carelessness at a coal mine, a 53rd

⁴⁵ AWM 30: B11.3/B17.2, WOII SA Edwards, 51st Bn. One source suggested that British soldiers were singled out for harsh treatment where the French, who 'grovelled' to the Germans, were favoured: 'Warrior Race: The British Experience of War from Roman Times to the Present', by Lawrence James (Little, Brown and Company, London, 2001), p 497.

⁴⁶ AWM 30: B B6.7(2), Ptes SJ Lawlis and JA Madden, 18th Bn. See also comment by Pte ET Ensor (16th Bn, AWM 30: B13.22) that the AIF had the Germans 'bluffed. If a Boche (*sic*) struck one of our lads he was sure to get one back in return.' His Statement can be found in the section from p 200.

⁴⁷ AWM 30: B14.1, L/Cpl P Freirat.

⁴⁸ AWM 30: B16.17, Pte JC Elliott.

⁴⁹ AWM30: B13.5/RC W 0350505, Pte JE Benson, 13th Bn.

Bn man's back and chest were crushed in a severe accident; he received 'abominable' treatment in hospital. Later, at an iron foundry, men were driven to work at revolver-point; at Essen, parcels were held up as part of 'strafing' the POWs. They were subject to the 'silly stand' for three nights in mid-winter until they collapsed from 'sheer weakness and lack of food'. Then they were brutally beaten with rifle butts and this man received facial injuries.⁵⁰

A soldier who had worked in a steel works attached to a lager for nine months, after about six weeks at a shell-case factory, 'purposely' burnt his hand. He was sent to another lager and, later, on commando digging potatoes. His actions do not seem to have caused him any trouble with the Germans.⁵¹

Work in mines

While conditions on some commandos were brutal, those in the mines and quarries were undoubtedly the harshest. Some men found easier work later.

A British Parliamentary Committee reported on the employment of (British) POWs in coal and salt mines. It noted that, since early 1915, a POW's lot had depended more and more on the commando to which he was sent. It was never doubted which of the various tasks that might be assigned was in every way the worst and to be dreaded most.⁵²

There were more than 50 coal or salt mines in Germany and those working in them endured 'a singularly cruel and dangerous form of slavery.' Although this Report was dated November 1918, its evidence was 'scarcely a month old' and it made the point that conditions generally were 'still as they were three years ago', longer than the period that any Australian was employed in any mine.

It asserted that in fact, though not ostensibly, work in the mines was a punishment and that, when selections were made, they fell first on those that had incurred the displeasure of the commandant or his subordinates. In some areas and by some commandants, it seems to have been used specifically against the British. A prisoner at Soltau overheard French and Belgian prisoners being threatened with work in the Ehmen salt mines: 'the British are sent there in the ordinary course.' As there

⁵⁰ AWM 30: B14.1, Pte J Steele.

⁵¹ AWM 30: B13.22, Pte A Hurt, 16th Bn.

⁵² What follows is a digest of The Government Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War: 'Report on the Employment in Coal and Salt Mines of the British Prisoners of War in Germany', 2 November 1918 (Miscellaneous No 23 (1918)); see AWM 38, 3DRL 6673, Item 216, for this and other reports by the Committee on the treatment of POWs.

was little difference between AIF and Imperial soldiers, and many Germans did not understand why Australia was fighting, it is not surprising that so many of the AIF worked in mines.

POWs tried to avoid this work and, because both the German guards and mine staff were unprepared for resistance, they were at first successful. By the end of 1915, well before any of the AIF reached the mines, treatment had become much harsher: beatings, long shifts until quotas were reached and lack of food were all common. The Report pointed out that small parties, cut off and without effective means of appeal 'have, of course, been powerless against systematic violence.'

In addition to work at the seams, there were also miscellaneous tasks at the pit head. These could include work on coke ovens: sprinkling coke with water as it came from the furnace and shovelling it into trucks. Many of the AIF were put to this work.

Men could refuse to go to the mines but at a price: no letters or Red Cross parcels, and 21 days' 'cells'. Many were knocked down with rifle butts if they refused, and were sent anyway.⁵³

The British Parliamentary Committee referred to the Ehmen salt mine in its report. At least one Australian was there for over a year. The food was very bad and, if the given task was not completed in one shift, men often remained for a second.⁵⁴

It was about 430 metres to the bottom level at one iron mine, and a 28th Bn soldier was made to work hard, treated brutally and starved: the food was 'not for human consumption.' Repeatedly punished for not working, or not hard enough, he waited for more than five months for parcels and 'suffered terribly'. He was sent to a farm where he was much better treated and the work was not so hard.⁵⁵

Another man worked in coal mines for five months, 'callously treated' and exposed to the cold for refusing to work. For 18 months he was at another coal mine, where he worked for 14 days after the Armistice.⁵⁶

Even in harsh conditions, Australians could still get into trouble. A soldier at Bottrop coal mine was charged with 'doing bodily harm' and threatening manslaughter to a German worker. His court martial dragged on until the Armistice.⁵⁷

⁵³ Pte J Thompson, 13th Bn (AWM 30: B13.5) also commented on those who worked behind the lines: see above. See also Pte WH Rice (32nd Bn): AWM 30, B16.11.

⁵⁴ AWM 30: B10.4, Pte E Solomon, 46th Bn.

⁵⁵ AWM 30: B6.9(2), Pte RH Ford (28th Bn).

⁵⁶ AWM 30: B11.3, Pte FC Pope, 51st Bn.

⁵⁷ AWM 30: B10.5, Pte DWR Whiteoak, 47th Bn.

Australians who returned to the UK drew attention to comrades sent to the mines. A 13th Bn lance-corporal was asked to protest about 'our boys' being sent to the salt mines attached to that lager. The slightest scratch meant the loss of a limb and the hours of work were long. It was very cold, only straw mattresses were provided as bedding, 'fleas and rats abounded.'⁵⁸

Another told of the plight of a soldier from 21st Bn. After an attempted escape, he was sent on a 'strafe' commando to a coal mine 'recognised as one of the worst commandos in Germany.' He had been severely wounded: one lung was 'pretty well destroyed' and was 'totally unfit' for manual labour of any sort; if he remained there, he would surely die.⁵⁹

Wulfruth Quarry

While working in the mines was particularly bad, there were other places where men were also harshly treated. One of these was a quarry at Wulfruth where there was heavy work, long hours and 'light food'. Men were 'kicked about' and, as well as the stoppage of parcels for refusing to work, the 'silly stand' was used. There were some negotiations with a German officer, but nothing was gained from his 'promise'.⁶⁰

An Australian saw a man from his unit forced to work in the rain; he had a broken arm that was 'now useless'. The managing director was responsible and a document was forwarded to Honorary Secretary, British POW Committee, setting out the brutalities at this quarry. The hours of work were 6am to 6pm, food was 'wretched' and, while all the POWs seem to have been 'belted', the guards could be bribed to reduce the work.⁶¹

One of the 48th Bn men captured with the AAMC party at Mouquet Farm was at Wulfruth for a year. He was given two days 'silly stand' for refusing to work on Sundays, and was 'severely' thrashed with rifles, a rubber hose, and the flat side of a sword for an attempt to escape. He saw other acts of cruelty: in particular, Pte Jeffrey (21st Bn) was 'severely flogged' by German NCOs.⁶²

⁵⁸ AWM 30: B13.5, L/Cpl R Wallach (13th Bn). L/Cpl WE Henley (48th Bn) was asked to pass on the same protest: men who had been in the mines 'are not allowed to be repatriated': AWM 30: B10.13.

⁵⁹ See AWM 30: B13.11.

⁶⁰ AWM 30: B6.16(1), Pte J Richards, 21st Bn.

⁶¹ AWM 30: B 6.16(1), Pte F Hallihan, 21st Bn. It has not been possible to trace this report.

⁶² AWM 30: B10.11, Pte GW Anderson.

The turned tide

From August 1918, the Australians noted that some Germans began to understand that their nation was beaten. A 5th MG Bn soldier, on commando at a stone quarry where the workers had been ‘brutally ill-treated and constantly struck rifle butts’, observed that this treatment ceased with Germany’s reverses.⁶³

Many POWs were kept working for periods after the Armistice, for weeks in some cases. One man was ‘compelled’ to work on for about a week, while another noted that ‘some of us were compelled’ to work after that event. A third had been at a coke works for 13 months and, while his group refused to work after 11 November, they were unable to leave for more than a week. A man working east of Berlin was kept at his job by the Germans until 23 January 1919.⁶⁴

Conclusions

The Hague Convention did not envisage all the demands of a modern ‘war economy’, where all aspects of a nation’s industry and labour were harnessed. As the war lengthened, pre-conflict views about what was ‘excessive’ or connected to ‘the operations of war’ became irrelevant. Few Statements mentioned payment for work.

AIF POWs showed no specific knowledge of the Convention’s provisions, but some resisted working in war-related industries. By repeating a prohibition on the use of POWs on ‘any work which is directly connected to the operations of war’ in their July 1918 Agreement, the British and German Governments recognised the problem. While they added a stipulation that POWs could not be ‘compelled’ to undertake such work, the AIF’s experiences suggest that little changed before November 1918.⁶⁵

Germany did not have enough men for its military or industrial purposes, or the needs of agriculture: POWs were a way of meeting these needs, if not ideal in terms of efficient outputs. There were many accounts of the condition of men arriving at lagers from working parties, and it seems that they were only sent back to Germany when they were exhausted. POWs were given a wide range of jobs and some, especially those working behind the lines and in the mines, were brutally treated, supporting Ellis’ comment that treatment ‘varied from very bad to moderately good.’

⁶³ AWM 30: B16.17, Pte EJ Walker.

⁶⁴ AWM 30: B14.1, Pte H Crossley, 53rd Bn; B13.5, Cpl J Royston, 13th Bn; B6.14(1), Pte WJ Udall 20th Bn; B11.1, Pte FT Swanston, 50th Bn. See Chapter 9 for events after the Armistice.

⁶⁵ The crucial words in the 1907 Convention were: ‘shall have no connection with the operations of war’.

This was one area where, although there may not have been a German policy to ill-treat POWs, many of them were so treated.⁶⁶

Similarly, there can be no doubt that much of the work that POWs were forced to do was contrary to the provisions of The Hague Convention, but Germany's needs were always going to be paramount. Referring to the enormous numbers of Russians taken on the Eastern Front, General Erich von Ludendorff has been quoted as stating that POWs were of 'the utmost importance' in all fields of Germany's war activity.⁶⁷

On the evidence, it seems unlikely that the output of many of the AIF was very valuable. There may have been some economic advantages in using POW labour, such as offsetting the work they did against the costs of maintaining them. They were, however, generally inefficient, poorly motivated, ill-suited to the tasks they were given, often unable to communicate in their employers' language and subject to the 'eccentricities of confinement'.⁶⁸

As the British Parliamentary Committee stated, survival of an unwounded man depended on whether he was retained behind the lines and, if not, then to which commando he was allocated from a lager. If he was lucky, he was sent to a farm where he was well treated and received sufficient food. This was particularly important if his parcels did not arrive regularly. On some farms, hours were long and treatment was harsh, no better than what was experienced in factories or mines.

While individual Australians were often given reasonable treatment, a comment by a UK Examiner was relevant:

As the result of my experience so far of returning wounded British prisoners, I have formed the impression that it is not so much our wounded as our unwounded in German hands for whose treatment the solicitude of the British Government is needed. Apparently it is the position of the unwounded British made to work under lamentable conditions which warrants anxiety. The wounded seem to be treated humanely for the most part, at any rate, by the German surgeons.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ AD Ellis: 'The Story of the Fifth Australian Division' (Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, London, 1920), p 113. Some aspects of the treatment of the sick and wounded were also seriously deficient: see Chapter 7.

⁶⁷ Gerald H Davis: 'Prisoners of War in Twentieth-Century War Economies', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 12, No 4, October 1977, p 630.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Further Note by Examiner on the UK Statement by Pte ET Ensor, 16th Bn (AWM 30: B13.22). This Statement can be found in the section following p 200. Wounded at Bullecourt, he was exchanged via Holland and arrived in the UK on 20 January 1918.

Some NCOs had difficulty in proving their rank to enable them to continue to lead their men and, more importantly, avoid the heavy physical work often required. While self-promotion benefited some, improved conditions were not assured.

Most ORs had to do the work to which they were allotted. Refusing to work led to serious consequences for some ORs, and was not always successful. While the AIF in some lagers tried to hold their own against the Germans, and many mentioned poor treatment, there seems to have been little retaliation. Edwards' comment about the treatment of the Russians and Italians was chilling, more for its other implications than about treatment of the 'British'.

The experiences of Lawlis and Madden behind the lines were not typical. They were captured in April 1918 and, as they seemed to have coped with the demands of the working parties, they may have been stronger than those captured earlier in the war. They were lucky that the German in charge of their working party allowed them to receive food; rations were probably grossly inadequate for the work they had to do, especially without parcels.

While there were many serious and negative aspects to work for OR prisoners, it has been suggested that those men who had to work were better able to endure captivity than those who had to resort to activities such as lectures, amateur theatricals and 'leisure pursuits' to fill in time. Provided the conditions were reasonable, work was an acceptable alternative to confinement in a camp. The serious problem of mental depression, or barbed wire disease', was 'very markedly relieved by a congenial occupation. In spite of any beneficial effects of work, for most OR prisoners it was usually uncongenial and often accompanied by brutality.'⁷⁰

While the 1918 Agreement signed by Germany and the UK attempted to standardise work practices, it was not very effective in regulating what the Germans demanded of some of their prisoners. With more universal application, and because of the problems that had arisen between 1914 and 1918, the Geneva Convention of 1929 revised The Hague Convention's provision about work for POWs, replacing one article with eight.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Pat Reid and Michael Maurice: 'Prisoner of War' (Hamlyn, London, 1984), p 163; Richard Garrett: 'POW' (David & Charles, London, 1981), p 111. See Chapter 4 for the impact of captivity.

⁷¹ Convention Relative to Treatment of Prisoners of War, signed at Geneva on 27 July 1929, Section III, Labor of Prisoners of War, Articles XXVII to XXXIV.

Belligerents might use the labour of fit POWs according to their rank and aptitude. The exempt status of officers was reaffirmed, and the Convention added 'persons of equivalent status', but allowed them to request 'suitable' work which was to be secured as far as possible. NCOs were only required to do supervisory work, unless they specifically requested 'remunerative work'.⁷²

The detaining power was responsible for maintaining POWs working for private persons, the length of the working day was not to be excessive, including trips to/from work, and was not to exceed civilian workers' hours in the region engaged on the same work. Rest for 24 consecutive hours was to be provided every week, preferably on Sunday.⁷³

Most importantly, Articles XXXI and XXXII dealt with prohibited labour: work done by POWs 'shall have no direct relation with war operations'. The manufacture and transport of arms or munitions of any kind, or transporting material intended for combatant units, were especially prohibited. POWs were not to be used for unhealthy or dangerous work.⁷⁴

Finally, in Article XXXIII, the Convention specified that arrangements for work camps had to be similar to lagers, especially their sanitary arrangements, food, attention in case of sickness and accidents, and the receipt of correspondence and Red Cross parcels. Every such camp was to be dependent on a prisoner's lager whose commandant was responsible for observing the Convention's provisions in the work camp.⁷⁵

As a result of the experiences of the Second World War, the work that POWs could be required to undertake was again addressed in the 1949 Geneva Convention.⁷⁶

⁷² *ibid*, Article XXVII. AJ Barker: 'Behind Barbed Wire' (BT Batsford, London, 1970), p 102, stated that corporals and above were exempt.

⁷³ *ibid*, Articles XXVIII, XXX.

⁷⁴ *ibid*, Articles XXXI, XXXII.

⁷⁵ *ibid*, Article XXXIII.

⁷⁶ Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, known as 'Geneva III', signed on 12 August 1949. Section III, Articles XLIX to LVII. Ingrid Detter: 'The Law of War' (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p 333. The 1949 revision of the 1929 document replaced eight relatively short articles with nine more detailed provisions. In particular, Article L emphasised work that left men in 'a good state of physical and mental health'. It replaced prohibitions on the work that could be undertaken in Article XXXI of the 1929 Convention with certain activities that POWs would be allowed to undertake. Significantly, the 1949 Convention stipulated that NCOs were only required to undertake supervisory work. Additional Protocols I and II to the 1949 Convention of 8 June 1977 did not include references to work for POWs.

CHAPTER 6

ESCAPES

International agreements

Article VIII of the Annex to The Hague Convention made prisoners subject to 'the laws, regulations and orders' of the captor. It provided that escaped POWs recaptured before leaving enemy territory were 'liable to disciplinary punishment'. If POWs were recaptured after a later escape, they 'were not liable to any punishment' for the previous success. Periods of punishment for escapes were not defined.¹

In 1917, at The Hague the German and British Governments agreed on a range of matters relating to POWs and internees. From 1 August 1917, punishment for a 'simple attempt' to escape even if repeated, 'shall not exceed military confinement' for 14 days. Combined with other actions consequent upon or incidental to such an escape in respect of property, punishment 'shall not exceed military confinement for two months.'²

In July 1918, these Governments agreed to replace and expand the provisions of the 1917 Agreement dealing with the escapes of POWs. The new Agreement provided that the punishment for a single attempt, even if repeated, 'shall not exceed military confinement for 14 days.' If the escape attempt was with other POWs, the punishment would be 28 days; but the total duration of punishment combined with other offences relating to property or causing injury was not to exceed two months. These punishments applied to escapes from a camp or arrest of any kind.

Men recaptured after an unsuccessful attempt were not to be 'subject to any unnecessary harshness'. Anyone insulting or injuring them would be 'severely punished', and unsuccessful escapers were to be protected from violence of any kind. Recaptured officers were to be treated in a manner suitable to their rank.³

Collective punishments and deprivation of privileges because of the 'misbehaviour' of individuals were forbidden. Regulations were introduced for the

¹ Laws and Customs of War on Land, signed at The Hague on 18 October 1907, Chapter I, Section I.

² An Agreement between the British and German Governments concerning Combatant and Civilian Prisoners of War, signed at The Hague on 2 July 1917, paragraphs 16 and 17.

³ Agreement between the British and German Governments concerning Combatant Prisoners of War and Civilians, signed at The Hague on 14 July 1918, Article XLVIII. See below for some consideration of 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' escapes.

carrying out of punishments in camps: for officers at Annex V and at Annex VI for ORs.⁴

Escaping in the First World War

Writing about their escapes, many Second World War men acknowledged debts to those from the earlier conflict who had written about their experiences. While escaping in the First World War was difficult, it was probably 'easier, less dangerous and had a higher chance of success' than it was to become: primitive anti-escape techniques made it simpler to get out of new and improvised camps, police were less vigilant and punishments were generally lighter than in Nazi Germany.⁵

Even in the earlier war, escapers were seen as a breed apart. Once the instinct for survival reasserted itself, most men accepted captivity and tried to endure life, however unpleasant. Most escapers were officers: they did not have to work and had the leisure to prepare for escapes. Only a small percentage of POWs made persistent attempts to escape, and 'only 40 or 50' of the 8000 British officer escapers in the First World War were successful. Escape attempts were both a means of defiance and a way of occupying long, tedious days, perhaps as a useful part of a team, often understanding the small chance of success.⁶

As a result of books written after both wars, escaping has been regarded as the major preoccupation of POWs. These accounts, again mainly from officers, fostered the false impression that life in the lagers revolved around hatching plots, forging and improvising equipment. In fact, the wire seemed to present a challenge calling for action to only 'a very small proportion of men'. Some were undoubtedly motivated by patriotism and a desire to get back to the Front. For dedicated escapers, the primary motivation to escape may have been psychological: because the wire was there.⁷

There were many reasons why POWs were unable to contemplate the dangerous and demanding business of escaping, including wounds before capture and the effects of captivity. Those who became prisoners later in the war found it difficult

⁴ *ibid*, Articles XLIX and L.

⁵ Jonathan F Vance (ed): 'Encyclopedia of Prisoners of War and Internment' (ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, 2000), p 328. Michael Moynihan (ed): 'Black Bread and Barbed Wire: Prisoners in the First World War' (Leo Cooper, London, 1978), p 57.

⁶ Moynihan, p xii. Vance, p 86. Pat Reid and Maurice Michael: 'Prisoner of War' (Hamlyn, London, 1984), p 185. It is indicative of the bias, via memoirs and books, that so little information is available on escapes by ORs.

⁷ Moynihan, pp 57, 58. For the views of an officer escaper, see AJ Evans: 'The Escaping Club' (John Lane The Bodley Head Ltd, London, 1921), p 59. He was a POW of both the Germans and the Turks.

to understand the attitudes of men who had been captured early in the conflict and had already suffered brutal treatment in captivity. Some did not believe in escaping. One Senior British Officer (SBO) was alleged to have threatened that, on his return to the UK, he would court-martial any escaper. Another officer was reported to have stated openly that he would go to considerable lengths to prevent escapes, and there were supposedly many who thought that he was right.⁸

Moreover, it was not until the Second World War that it was accepted that it was the implicit 'duty' of all officers to try to escape, and only then that escape committees were recognizable institutions in camps of any size. Thus, in the First World War, individuals and small groups planning to escape tended to keep their plans to themselves. A notable exception was the tunnel from Holzminden camp in July 1918 from which 29 officers escaped; ten reached Holland, including the SBO.⁹

Escapers were not necessarily heroes to less adventurous men. Where conditions were tolerable, punishments following attempts could make an escaper 'widely unpopular': stopping parcels for a month could leave men working in a mine on about 250 grams of black bread per day.¹⁰

There are at least three ways to categorise escapes as 'successful'. The most obvious were those where men reached a neutral frontier and, after a period of quarantine, were sent back to the UK.

Even if an attempt did not reach a neutral frontier, those involved had gained experience that they, or others, could apply next time: information about areas to avoid or routes to take was always valuable. Simply breaking out of a lager was an achievement. The effort was worthwhile, particularly because German manpower, time and effort had to be used to recapture and escort men back to their camps, try them and guard them during the period of 'cells' that followed.

⁸ Reid and Michael, p 173. Richard Garrett: 'POW' (David & Charles, London, 1981), p 125. See also Sir Brian Horrocks: 'A Full Life' (Collins, London, 1960), p 29. Horrocks was captured in October 1914 and was lectured, later in the war, by the SBO at Clausthal in these terms.

⁹ Reid and Michael, pp 184-185. Vance, p 87. Referring to Ingolstadt, Evans would not have endorsed this view: p 59. See HG Durnford: 'The Tunnellers of Holzminden' (Cambridge University Press, 1920). No Australians were successful. In his war-time diary, a UK officer stated that in September 1917 there was a 'regular "Escape Committee"' at Holzminden: Moynihan, p 104. Horrocks, p 29, stated that in March 1918, because of their experience, he and two colleagues were 'elected by the hard core of escapers to take charge of all escaping activities' at Clausthal.

¹⁰ Moynihan, pp 57-58.

Finally, preparing to escape developed skills and filled in time. Although POWs may not have been aware of this, it probably reduced ‘barbed wire disease’.¹¹

Categorising an escape attempt as ‘unsuccessful’ only meant that the man or men involved had not reached a neutral frontier. There could be many reasons for lack of success, including: poor preparation, insufficient food, lack of fitness to walk to a distant neutral frontier, the effects of cold weather, the inability to speak German and, of course, bad luck.¹²

Thorough preparation was essential and, as men gained experience, attempts became more elaborate. The other crucial requirement could not be guaranteed: one AIF officer thought that there was always a considerable element of luck, good and bad, in every attempt. Some men waited months to put a pet scheme into practice, while others with no intention of escaping saw an opportunity and took it. He also believed that the better the treatment at a camp, the fewer attempts there were to escape: the high number from Strohenmoor at the time he was there was caused by the ‘unbearable conditions of living’.¹³

The camp or commando to which a POW was sent was crucial. The map of Germany accompanying this Study shows that those sent to places close to neutral frontiers had an advantage over men sent to central Germany. Those in eastern Germany, or in its captured territories, had to contend with different problems of language and distance.

The AIF experience

According to AIF records, two officers and 41 ORs succeeded in escaping from the Germans in 1917 and 1918. Awards made in 1920 showed that at least another three ORs were able to reach Holland or, in one case, Russia.¹⁴

Of the Sample of 701 men, 37 successfully escaped: one officer, 8 NCOs and 28 ORs. Another 50 attempted, at least once, to reach neutral territory: 14 officers, 6 NCOs and 30 ORs. Together, these groups were 12.4 per cent of the Sample, consistent with the fact that few men attempted to escape. More ORs than officers

¹¹ See Chapter 4 for this condition.

¹² *ibid*, p 58. While they may be not totally satisfactory, ‘successful’ and ‘unsuccessful’ will indicate whether or not an escaper/escapers reached neutral territory.

¹³ Capt JH Honeysett: 47th Bn, 3DRL/4043, pp 53-54, 61, 60. He also believed that escapers could rely on the ‘staunch support’ of every man ‘in the prison’. Strohenmoor was a ‘strafe’ (punishment) camp.

¹⁴ AWM 18, Item 9982/1/23: Statistical Return and Nominal Roll compiled to 11 February 1919.

were successful because, in many cases, the former were able to work outside camps on commandos.¹⁵

While some of the AIF gave little information about their exploits outside the wire, they often mentioned the period served in 'cells' for unsuccessful efforts. Assistance was sometimes given to would-be escapers from unlikely quarters, including their guards.¹⁶

In 1917, 15 men in the Sample escaped successfully, 22 in 1918: 16 of the latter in the six week period from 1 October to the Armistice. Hunger and a shortage of men may have been taking their toll on the Germans and, combined with revolution and increasing concerns about losing the war, their vigilance may have declined. When the AIF recognised some escapes in 1920, successes after 1 October 1918 did not seem to have been as highly regarded as were those made in 1917.

About the same number of Canadians as Australians were POWs from April 1915. While only one Canadian officer reached neutral territory, 99 ORs did. Most of them tried to reach Holland but two, including the officer, went to Denmark.¹⁷

Preparations

Thorough preparations were vital for success; they could include collecting and hiding food, acquiring and /or altering clothing, selecting a companion, learning some German and, for NCOs, joining a commando outside a lager. If possible, maps and compasses had to be obtained. German currency was needed for bribes and for buying food. Strictly forbidden in the camps, it was worth three or four times its face value, and greatly prized if it could be obtained. Decisions had to be made about methods of the escape and routes planned: some men walked by night and tried to sleep by day, others with more German used trains or trams when they could. Planning and acquiring necessities such as food took time but, while experience

¹⁵ These groups represented 5.3 and 7.1 per cent of the Sample respectively. If a man was successful after an earlier attempt, he was included in the former group. Whether these rates were higher than those for other Allied nations was outside the scope of this Study. Some First AIF escapes, reflected in the Sample but not in this Study, were set out in Colin Burgess: 'Freedom or Death: Australia's Greatest Escape Stories from Two World Wars' (Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1994).

¹⁶ See, for example, the accounts of Ptes FO Jarvey, 13th Bn (AWM 30: B13.5) and AJ Moore, 15th Bn (AWM 30: B13.18).

¹⁷ Desmond Morton: 'Silent Battle: Canadian Prisoners of War in Germany, 1914-1919' (Lester Publishing, Toronto, 1992), pp 98-99, 96.

showed the value of preparation, bad luck or unforeseen circumstances led back to a camp.¹⁸

Cheered by the promise of regular parcels, a 32nd Bn soldier was one of a number of men to learn German: 'I thought it was necessary if I wanted to escape.' With another man, he began to store food.¹⁹

While senior NCOs did not have to work, a warrant-officer was on a farm when he 'purloined' a pair of pincers and 'swopped' some food with a German for a German Automobile Club map of Southern Bavaria. For a piece of soap, he was able to get a compass from another German. While he did not state the quantities, he and his French companion carried cocoa, ration biscuits, chocolate and Oxo. They had studied the map and knew that it was about 160 kilometres to the Swiss frontier to the west of Lake Constance. On the frontier, a hill stood out and they used it as a beacon to reach Switzerland.²⁰

From his parcels, a lieutenant saved 'such things as Meat Gravy cubes, malted milk tablets, Swiss bread biscuits, tins of condensed milk and cocoa and milk and packets of chocolate all of which contained a lot of nourishment'.²¹

In October 1918, two Australians and a British soldier escaped from a commando about 160 kilometres from the Dutch border. The journey took 13 days and they only carried enough food for seven days, so that they were 'short' by the end.²²

In one case, preparations, and the resulting food seem to have been less than perfect. A 13th Bn man gave a Russian 25 biscuits for a map and, when he escaped with two British soldiers in October 1918, they each had ten biscuits, his small portion of bacon, and raw carrots. They picked turnips as they walked.²³

By March 1918, escapes could be elaborate. After a previous unsuccessful attempt, Pte E Gardiner (10th Bn) was on commando at a coal mine. He and an English soldier converted clothing to look like 'civvy' suits; they 'contrived' to get hold of 'civvy' hats and hid the new garments under their overalls when they went to

¹⁸ To reach neutral territory, escapers needed to have enough energy-giving food to be independent of other sources, and that most attempts failed because of lack of food: Reid and Michael, p 184. While this referred to Second World War escapes, it was equally true in the First World War. Honeysett, p 54.

¹⁹ AWM 30: B16.11, Pte WP Choat; L/Cpl JW Pitts, 50th Bn (AWM 30: B10.20).

²⁰ AWM 30: B11.3, WOII SA Edwards, 51st Bn. Soap was unobtainable in Germany, and would have been an attractive item to a guard. It probably came from Red Cross parcels.

²¹ AWM 2DRL/0417: Lt RE Sanders (14th Bn att 4th ALTM Bty). He was not in the Sample.

²² AWM 30: B6.1(1), Pte D Ferry, 25th Bn.

²³ AWM 30: B13.5, Pte JW Johnston, 13th Bn.

the mine. They also had a tracing of a map and a compass, bought through the lager's interpreter. They hid for 24 hours, leaving the mine with civilian workers.²⁴

Escapes from behind the lines

Some men did not remain POWs for long and were able to escape from areas dangerously close to the German line. Determination and an ability to take immediate advantage of opportunities were needed to undertake such risky ventures. Luck was also vital, as it was necessary to cross both the German and Allied lines.

While on a working party unloading trains of engineering material at a dump close to the German line, L/Cpl H Parsons and Pte G Stewart (16th Bn) found a pair of wire cutters which they hid in straw, waiting for use in an escape.²⁵

On 20 May 1917, they slipped through the wire and walked all night with two other men from their unit. At daybreak, they hid under a hedge in a wood; able to see a hill ahead, they thought that this was the 'British' front line. That night, when they were 'quite safely' within 500 metres of the line, the group divided. It was very dark and it began to rain, so that they could only move between the constant flares.²⁶

Although they did not know it, Parsons and Stewart were crossing German Reserve trenches smashed by shell fire. They crawled in and out of shell holes to a sap until they were about 60 metres from the Allied line and, as they moved closer, shots were fired. Parsons was hit in the shoulder, and they were challenged in English. They rushed into an Australian trench, 'near the spot' where they had been captured.²⁷

While Stewart returned to Australia in July 1917, Parsons did not return until 16 March 1919: from Egypt as a private in 10th LH Regt. It was AIF policy to allow escaped POWs to return to Australia; he was one of the few that did not.²⁸

Ptes AM Falconer and JF McIntosh (47th Bn) and A Thompson (48th Bn) were captured at Passchendaele on 13 October 1917. They were taken to a collection centre in a disused wool factory and, despite a lack of preparation, this trio seems to have been determined to escape. It was not easy to talk to Belgians: even though guards

²⁴ AWM 30: B 5.33. For use of imitation German uniforms in an unsuccessful escape by officers in November 1917, see below.

²⁵ AWM 30: B13.22 and AWM 3DRL/1469. This chronology is suspect.

²⁶ The other two men were re-captured. This escape showed how close to the Front Line POWs could be made to work: see Chapter 5.

²⁷ See OH, Vol IV, p 342, fn 189, AWM 38, 3DRL 606, Item 150(1) for Bean's hand-written account, and Chapter 3 for their loss of weight during captivity.

²⁸ Commandant, AIF Admin HQ to Miss ME Chomley, Hon Secretary, ARCS, 15 May 1918: AWM 10, Item 4332/18/29.

watched carefully and kept the POWs away, the men did find out the direction of the Dutch frontier.²⁹

On 24 October, they escaped by climbing up a steam-pipe about 10 metres high, crossing a girder and getting through a skylight in the roof. They did not have watches, map or compass but made their way by the stars and received help from Belgians, some of whom could speak English. Near the frontier, they had to wait for a moonless night. On the seventh night, they got a spade from a farm and used it the next, darker night to dig a hole under the fence at the bottom of a dyke, to get into the field on the other side of the frontier.³⁰

Cpl CW Lane and Pte Reinhold Carl Ruschpler (4th MG Bn) were captured at Dernancourt on 5 April 1918. Through the day, they carried wounded to German dressing stations. When they met again in the evening, they decided to wait until dark to attempt to escape. Before they could, they had to take the body of a German doctor back to his billet and were then marched further back. Among about 200 POWs, including two other Australians, they spent five days ‘on various general fatigues’.³¹

The party levelled ground for a new aerodrome, and lived in an old British POW cage. A shell had hit the wire, the hole had not been mended properly and there was no sentry. On the night of 10 April, with an English soldier, the two Australians clambered over and through the wire and made towards Dernancourt. After about three kilometres, they ran into some Germans and had to ‘cut and run’ across country. They lost their companion and frequently had to hide from groups of Germans; when challenged, they did not answer.

Once through the enemy reserve and support trenches, the Allied line was 200 to 300 metres away: they made a ‘blackguard bolt’. Although they were fired at, by early on 13 April, they were with an Australian unit. Lane and Ruschpler were passed up from battalion to brigade and division, to see General Birdwood himself.

Unsuccessful attempts, then success

Many escapers made more than one attempt to reach freedom. While thorough preparation was always vital, a previous attempt often provided vital experience.

²⁹ AWM 30: B10.7, Ptes AM Falconer and JF McIntosh (47th Bn), and A Thompson (48th Bn).

³⁰ Thompson’s UK Statement has the most detailed account of this escape. The Examiner commented: ‘While in no way doubting his veracity, I should say he enjoys telling a good story.’

³¹ AWM 30: B10.5/B11.11/RC W 1550209.

Soon after his arrival at a paper factory, Pte H West (51st Bn) escaped: guards were fewer and weaker than at a quarry where he had been. He was re-captured on the frontier when he 'ran straight into' a sentry. Back at Walsum after 14 days on bread and water, he 'borrowed' a pair of pincers to mend his boots; he and a Canadian soldier cut the wire and escaped. They met two German women who gave the alarm but, in the dark, the men got away. Using West's map and compass, they went north-east to the River Lippe, then due north to the Dutch frontier which they crossed after walking for four days. Poor guards and luck in getting away from the women, together with prior experience and preparation, had led to success.³²

Choat was determined, resourceful but, initially, unlucky in spite of mastering some German. In September 1917, he escaped from Düsseldorf with Pte LH Barry (1st Fd Coy Engrs) and a Canadian. They climbed out of a window, down a lightning conductor and over a fence; Choat had a small sketch map and the stars served as a compass. When they reached the outskirts of a town, he was sufficiently confident about his German to ask a policeman for directions. Later, they were cross-examined by a 'military policeman': they pretended successfully to be Belgian workers. Surprised by a sentry at Kaldenkirchen, the Belgian story did not work again; they were taken to Aachen and from there to a lager to await trial. When questioned, they did not tell the Germans that they had crossed the Rhine by train.³³

Within an hour of his release from solitary confinement, Choat had a map and compass and had changed all his camp money into German currency. Next day, he began preparing clothes for a second attempt. With Pitts and Barry, he escaped again with three others, breaking into three groups outside the camp. This time, because of his previous knowledge, 'things came off without a hitch': Choat and Pitts were able to cross the Rhine by train, avoided Kaldenkirchen and, in steady rain, worked their way west. At the Dutch frontier three days later, the weather was in their favour: guards were sheltering from the rain.³⁴

³² AWM 30: B11.3.

³³ AWM 30: B16.11. Barry said that the sketch had come from 'some sympathetic German woman': AWM 30: B5.53.

³⁴ AWM30: B16.11. The other four men were recaptured. See also Choat's memoir: Mitchell Library Mss 1504.

Successful escapes

Edwards and his French companion were to be successful in April 1918, initially because of conditions at their accommodation. While they had collected food for an escape, they had to travel in prisoners' clothes. Using the pincers that Edwards had stolen, they cut barbed wire across a window and took advantage of 'rather rotten' woodwork to remove a window bar. They lowered themselves on a bed-sheet past the window of the room where their guards slept.³⁵

The two travelled by night, hiding in the woods by day; because it was so cold among the trees, they got very little sleep. Edwards had improvised a 'camp cooker' from a tobacco tin and, with some fat, they were able to brew cocoa that 'did us the world of good'.

Sentries about 30 metres apart guarded the frontier but, happily for the escapees, they did not 'properly patrol', taking cover behind anything available. While the night of 9 May was cloudy, there was little ground cover at the frontier, so the men had to crawl across the last few hundred metres between sentries. About 30 metres on the Swiss side, they were noticed and a sentry fired at them. Neither man was hit and they 'scurried into safety...just about done up', surrendering at a customs house. Their experiences illustrated the physical demands of escaping. In spite of the climate, their preparation and determination led to success, with a little help from guards at the frontier.³⁶

While smaller parties seem to have been more successful, larger groups could also escape successfully. Hearing of the Armistice with Austria-Hungary, and knowing that two of them were being sent to a mine next day, three men decided to make for the frontier. They were ready to escape: they had a rough sketch of the route, a compass, and 'a little German which helped us a great deal', but little food: they believed they could reach the frontier in three days. Their escape coincided with reduced vigilance and disturbances in Germany and Austria-Hungary, and they were able to see a good deal of southern Europe before going to the UK.

On 5 November 1918, they crawled through the wire, dodged sentries and waited in the shade of a shed for two hours to get past the last sentry to open country. They travelled north that night, going as fast and far as they could, hiding in the

³⁵ See B.17.2 for a copy of the map. The sheet was the only one Edwards had seen in Germany.

³⁶ He was one of only two in the Sample to head for Switzerland. The other was not successful: Pte FG Best, 16th Bn (AWM 30: B13.22).

woods about daybreak. Two nights later, they reached the Black Forest and had a narrow escape: a villager came upon their camp and alerted police; a torch-light search was unsuccessful. On 9 November, the party crossed the frontier and were taken by locals to Eger; from there, they took a train to Pilsen and then to Prague.

Advised not to go to Vienna, they found the POW camp for Italians just outside the city 'no good' but they were well treated in a hospital to which they were sent. The group seems to have gone to Trieste and then to Venice and Padua via Vienna, before catching a 'leave' train that was supposed to go to Le Havre but took them to Cherbourg before they went to the UK.

As Edwards had found, poor facilities and lazy guards assisted escapes. Capt JE Mott (48th Bn) planned several methods of escape and, in September 1917, with Lt HC Fitzgerald (19th Bn), he used a key that they had made to open one of the gates at Strohenmoor. On the fifth night out, after travelling only at night across moors and swamps and avoiding any important roads and bridges, Fitzgerald was recaptured on the eastern side of the Ems Canal.³⁷

Mott continued alone and crossed the Dutch frontier near Denekamp, where sentries with bloodhounds patrolled a little distance apart. He spent about a fortnight in Holland and reached London on 11 October 1917, one of only two successful AIF officer escapers.³⁸

As part of his preparations, Peachey 'received' a map from a 'little Belgian girl' who had previously buried it in a rubbish heap. While he did not have a compass, during his journey a farmer gave him a piece of rubber; its purpose was to be clear at the frontier. Bad security helped initially, but during the journey risks were taken and his party was ruthless.³⁹

On 5th November 1917, with Pte J Lee (14th Bn) and a British soldier, Peachey left their compound: 'luckily', they had found a key to open a gate in the outer wire, told a guard he was required inside and slipped away. They 'managed' to acquire civilian clothes, which 'helped considerably'. Nearing Brussels, where they thought they could find assistance, they found it heavily guarded by police and cavalry. They

³⁷ AWM 30: B10.13. His UK 'Interview' only covered Mott's time as a POW; it can be found in the section following p 200. See AWM 30: B6.10(2) for Fitzgerald's account.

³⁸ OH, Vol IV: p 343, fn 189. Bean stated that Mott rejoined his unit, serving as its CO: he may have acted as CO. The other successful officer was 2/Lt H Johnson (1st MG Bn); he did not submit a Statement and was not in the Sample.

³⁹ AWM 30: B13.18, L/Cpl FAWC Peachey, 15th Bn. It was not clear that Peachey understood why he was given the piece of rubber, until he reached the frontier.

lost their way, decided to take a risk and walked through the city, crossing a large bridge without being challenged.⁴⁰

The border was strongly guarded and there was no cover, so the last phase of this escape was physically demanding. The men crawled for two or three kilometres and then lay low for four hours, taking note of the guards and their beats. At dusk on 25th November, they crawled close to a guard who seemed to suspect something. They decided that that they must 'deal' with him. Then Peachey used his piece of rubber to lift the electrified wire from the ground and they crawled through. The arcing from the wires attracted another sentry whose shot missed.⁴¹

In a wood about half a kilometre from the mine, Gardiner and his companion washed and completed their disguises before catching a tram for about 30 kilometres. They walked through a bog to the frontier where they gave themselves up to the Dutch: the trip from the pithead had taken 26 hours.⁴²

The German retreat in 1918, together with a hint, played a role in one escape. While returning to camp on 8 August 1918, a German with 'excellent English' told a party including Pte TM Olsen (19th Bn) that the Allies had advanced 11 kilometres, and 'plainly suggested' that this was their chance 'to make a break for it.' They got through the wire around the camp and headed towards the gunfire. Olsen implied that two small groups of Germans let them go, knowing that they were POWs. Stumbling through shell holes and barbed wire, they decided to risk walking on the road, and then heard the password. They used it several times and, on 10 August, they found AIF personnel.⁴³

Taylor's peregrinations

The account by Pte TE Taylor (14th Bn) revealed a good deal about escaping at the end of the war. He was on commando in East Prussia about 12 kilometres from the Polish border. While it was useful to be accompanied by Russians heading for their country, it seems that his preparations did not include checking the honesty of one of his companions. Taylor was in Russia and Moscow in turbulent times, and his experiences were very different to those of most AIF escapers.

⁴⁰ Peachey thought that the other men were recaptured.

⁴¹ Lee did not mention the 'little affair' with the sentry.

⁴² AWM 30: B5.33. In September 1917, he had been through this area to within four kilometres of the Dutch frontier. See Moynihn, pp 65-75, for his companion's account.

⁴³ AWM 30: B6.7(2). He was with five British soldiers.

While he had thought of escaping for ‘some considerable time’, it seems that the change from a tough but reasonable boss to a ‘Prussian bully’ early in November 1918 pushed him to escape with three Russians who spoke German but little English; one had a compass, another a map. After speaking to other Russians who had escaped and been recaptured, they decided to head for Minsk on the Russian/Polish border, about 640 kilometres away. Over a few months, Taylor saved ‘quite a store’ from his Red Cross parcels: the bully beef and biscuits were ‘just suitable’. Knowing the distance they proposed to travel, the party tried to conserve their food; what they carried almost got them across Poland. It did not seem to be hard to leave the camp.⁴⁴

The party reached Minsk in three weeks, after nearly being recaptured and experiencing difficulty in crossing the River Niemen. At Smolensk, one of the Russians stole his money; both Taylor’s book and his Statement expressed outrage that a man with whom he had shared difficult times, and his parcels, should have done this. A Russian army officer gave him enough money to get to Moscow.⁴⁵

When he reached Moscow, he worked for the Anglican Church and then, until March 1919, for the Red Cross. In addition to a ‘smattering of German and French, he spoke enough Russian ‘to rub along’ and, with a room at the Danish Consulate, worked at various jobs. These included dealing at a market in household commodities, particularly soap, and he acquired ‘quite a tidy bit of capital’. It was winter in Moscow: there was little firewood, and there was a typhus epidemic. Meals were all the same: black bread, a few fried potatoes and a little horse flesh.⁴⁶

As the Danish Consul hinted that Taylor was not going to leave Russia while he was dealing in goods, he bribed doctors to issue a certificate that he was in bad health and had to be sent back to the UK ‘at once.’ He left on 7 March and, travelling via Finland, Norway and Sweden, arrived in the UK two years after his capture.⁴⁷

Unsuccessful attempts

Despite commendable determination, many men failed to reach the German frontier; there were many reasons for their lack of success. In one case, it was an

⁴⁴ TE Taylor: ‘The Peregrinations of an Australian prisoner of war’ (EW Cole, Melbourne, 1920), pp 25, 26; AWM 30, B13.11. Captured unwounded at Bullecourt, he worked for four months behind the lines. He then worked on commando in East Prussia: in the forest in winter, including on one of the Kaiser’s estates, and on a farm in summer.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, pp 29-30, 34.

⁴⁶ *ibid*, pp 36, 37, 39, 42. The Danes looked after British interests in Russia at this time.

⁴⁷ Taylor, pp 45-47.

inability to speak German. The lieutenant from 14th Bn/4th ALTM Bty bore a slight resemblance to a guard and was able to make 'a very excellent' copy of the guards' uniform, but he was unable to respond to remarks from a sentry. Deciding that it was not possible to escape from Saarlouis camp, for nine months he learnt German in the hope that it would help next time.⁴⁸

Fitzgerald was determined and resourceful but always unlucky. After he was recaptured in September 1917, he was taken to a guardhouse. He escaped again, only to be caught by a bicycle patrol. Next morning, on the way to the railway station, he broke away but was headed off by a civilian who knocked him unconscious by hitting him on the head with a stick.⁴⁹

While exhaustion and an unscrupulous guard prevented Sgts OS Cole (29th Bn) and EA Fitch (5th Bn) from reaching Holland, their story had a sequel. In October 1917, six days after their escape near Bohmte camp, they were at the frontier when a German guard approached, telling them they were not in Holland. He threatened to shoot and, tired and foot-sore, they surrendered.⁵⁰

As part of the Permanent Investigation Committee relating to AIF members refused internment, Major JJ Hughes (32nd Bn), the AIF Representative in Holland, forwarded a report on this incident to AIF Admin HQ London. On 10 March 1918, a Dutch representative visited Hameln lager. Cole and Fitch put their case in the presence of the commandant, saying that they could locate on a map the place where this had occurred. The Germans admitted that the NCOs' story was correct, and that the guard had been armed in neutral territory.

The Dutch representative said that he would place the matter before the War Minister in Berlin and see what could be done. The men heard nothing further, although they had written to the Ambassador nearly two months before they left Germany in August 1918. Their account of the incident was later confirmed from German sources: they had been about 100 metres into Holland.⁵¹

⁴⁸ AWM 2DRL/0417. He was not to be successful.

⁴⁹ AWM 30: B6.10(2) of 31 January 1919.

⁵⁰ AWM 30: B16.1; B5.13. Neither man mentioned this episode in their Statements; they were exchanged to Holland in August 1918.

⁵¹ See AWM 18, 9982/4/4 of 9 September 1918, Schedule E.

It is likely that Fitch and Cole were given 21 days' 'cells' for their attempt. It was not Fitch's only try: ARCS records show that, on 10 November 1917, he was in hospital recovering from 'another' escape: he may have tried again.⁵²

Punishment for escapes

For ORs, the punishment for unsuccessful escapes was usually 14 days' 'cells', sometimes in solitary confinement in small spaces. The diet was bread and water, with other food every few days, but there does not seem to have been much resentment of this regime.

While Choat and Pitts reached Holland, Barry's second unsuccessful attempt to escape came to an end when he was found in a wood. Barry 14 days' 'cells' included both Christmas Day 1917 and New Year's Day 1918.⁵³

For officers who had been unsuccessful, some sentences were lenient. Trying to reach Russia, a MG Bn officer was recaptured after 'wandering about' for five days. He was put into a cell for six days, tried and sentenced to another eight days 'cells'. His preparations seem to have been inadequate, and the punishment did not seem to be resented.⁵⁴

The Germans clearly viewed some escapers more seriously than others. After one of Fitzgerald's attempted escapes from Holzminden, the Germans found him carrying prohibited articles: money, passports, compass and map. He and his companion were also wearing imitations of the German uniform. He was charged, tried and remanded; eventually, he was court-martialled and found guilty: fined 250 marks or sentenced to 50 days' imprisonment. Digging a tunnel at Clausthal, he was reluctant to give the Germans money but paid the fine.⁵⁵

Lt PW Lyon (11th Bn) served five weeks 'cells' after an unsuccessful escape. He then spent 13 months in harsh conditions at Holzminden, and was one of two Australians involved in the escape from the tunnel there in July 1918. Recaptured 'on

⁵² RC W 1061001.

⁵³ Barry was to be exchanged, reaching the UK in February 1918: see Chapter 3.

⁵⁴ AWM 30: B10.5, Lt CA Myers, 4th MG Bn.

⁵⁵ AWM 30: B6.10(2) of 3 January 1919. This Statement dealt only with the court-martial after this escape.

the Dutch frontier' after 12 days, he received 'cells' for two months: the punishment for other offences committed as part of an escape.⁵⁶

In addition to 'cells' sanctioned by this Agreement, and in spite of prohibitions of harsh treatment after recapture, additional and unofficial punishments seem to have been common. A 48th Bn soldier was 'severely thrashed' after an unsuccessful escape in February 1918. Another from 10th Bn was recaptured after an attempt to escape and, on the way back, he was flogged for about eight kilometres and then again in the presence of an under-officer when put under arrest.⁵⁷

In August 1917, three sergeants were recaptured seven nights out of camp. Their hands were tied behind their backs and they were made to march at fair pace for 12 kilometres on a hot day. They were not given anything to drink and were 'tantalised' by their guards 'the whole time'.⁵⁸

Recognition

In 1920, 33 Australians received a range of awards for escaping or attempting to escape: 23 were in the Sample. Mott received a Bar to the MC he had been awarded in 1919, Honeysett and Fitzgerald received MCs, 16 ORs received MMs. Three officers and one OR were mentioned in dispatches 'for gallant conduct and determination in escaping or attempting to escape'.⁵⁹

In the Sample, four of the 16 MMs were for successful escapes in 1918, only one from 1 October, while 14 MMs and the Bar to Mott's MC were awarded for those in 1917. These awards ignored some good work. It seems that, although the number in 1918 was significant, the AIF decided that successful escapes from 1 October were less deserving of awards than those made earlier that year, or in 1917.⁶⁰

Parsons and Stewart had each been awarded the MM in November 1917. Falconer, McIntosh and Thompson were on the 1920 list; in spite of their progress up the chain of command after their return, Lane and Ruschpler were not.

⁵⁶ AWM 30: B5.44. The other was Capt GG Gardiner, 13th Bn (AWM 30: B13.5). See AWM 18, Item 9982/5/1 of 8 November 1918 for correspondence on this sentence. Lyon was still at Holzminden on 11 November 1918.

⁵⁷ AWM 30: B10.11, Pte GW Anderson; B5.33, Pte CJ Mara. See Article XLVIII of The Hague Agreement, 1918, above.

⁵⁸ AWM 30: B6.16(1), Sgt DW Curphey, 21st Bn.

⁵⁹ See Commonwealth Gazette, No 38, 29 April 1920, pp 623-624. The MID for Pte FJ Allen (53rd Bn) was posthumous: see Chapter 9.

⁶⁰ Pte JW Johnston (13th Bn) received the MM for an escape on 8 October. Eight of the nine men not in the Sample who received awards in 1920 had escaped in 1918, two on 1 October.

Conclusions

Those Australians who escaped from the Germans in 1917 and 1918 did so against considerable odds and, while some were not 'successful', they also deserved credit. A few were successful in dangerous attempts from just behind the German lines. Escape was impossible for many men: some were badly wounded and destined to remain hospitalised in Germany until they were exchanged or interned. Even if a neutral frontier was not far away, 'barbed wire disease' might prevent men from making the necessary preparations. Some were under harsh regimes in 'strafe' camps, while others were closely guarded working outside lagers.

While only a few men were determined to escape, many in the Sample tried more than once. Determination, experience, preparation and, above all, luck led to successful escapes: Cole and Fitch encountered a guard who bluffed them into surrender, men such as Fitzgerald and Sanders were indefatigable but unlucky. Things such as poor security, guards who were lazy or could be bribed, some knowledge of German and a neutral frontier nearby were vital for success; some German currency also helped. While the language could be learned, the lager or commando to which a POW was sent might not be close to a neutral frontier. At a price, maps and compasses were available from some guards, and some Germans were sympathetic to the POWs. At considerable risk to themselves, French and Belgian people were able sometimes to provide maps and advice.

From the beginning of October 1918, the growing possibility of defeat, hunger, a shortage of men and revolution seem to have combined to make it easier to escape. Those who were successful in this period were not always recognised for their efforts, but some who had escaped earlier in the war were also overlooked.

The Agreements reached between the Germans and the British at The Hague in 1917 and 1918 were attempts to make the 1907 Convention more specific, and to regulate the punishments awarded for escapes and any damage done during them. While these were laid down, it was not possible to prevent unofficial punishments by German soldiers or guards. Nor could these Agreements deal with the irritations of POW life that, among other things and by design, interfered with plans to escape.

While most had not been seriously wounded before capture, few of the

German-Australians seemed to make attempts to escape: only Ruschpler was successful.⁶¹

Officers did not have to work, could receive more parcels and were able to buy more food than ORs. They were also much more closely guarded: Niemeyer at Holzminden, for example, prided himself that escape was not possible. The two officers who wrote detailed memoirs tried several times but were both unsuccessful.

What was the bane of many ORs life, working for the Germans, was ultimately to benefit some of them. Sent out of camps to work on commandos, often prepared and experienced from earlier attempts and not well guarded, some were able to take advantage of opportunities. NCOs could volunteer for work which assisted attempts, depending primarily on the location of commandos.

Many more Canadians than Australians reached neutral territory but, like the AIF and for the same reasons, a disproportionate number were ORs.

Only two of the would-be escapers headed for Switzerland; one succeeded. Several reached freedom through Russia. The Dutch frontier was closer to most lagers, and men may have known that they would receive warmer welcomes in Holland.

Most successful escapers exercised the right to return to Australia as soon as they could. While Sgt PJ Fleming (15th Bn) volunteered, only Mott, Parsons and Thomas returned to active service.⁶²

While little has been written about the escapes of AIF POWs in the First World War, much of the detail above is familiar from post-1945 escape literature. Between the wars, some Allied soldiers wrote about their escapes, and these books inspired and guided POWs in the later conflict. Some were translated and unwittingly assisted captor nations: they were supposedly ‘compulsory reading’ for commandants and guards. Little was omitted from these accounts, giving later POWs and guards greater knowledge of escaping. From the arrival of the first POWs, guards in Second World War camps could have been aware of nearly every trick used previously. As

⁶¹ Of the unsuccessful, only Ptes H Giese and N Gunter (both 13th Bn) appear to have been German-Australians. Pte S Sutchkoff (47th Bn) was a Russian.

⁶² As he escaped on 1 October 1918, his leave and the Armistice prevented Fleming’s return to France. Pte HL Thomas (30th Bn, AWM 30: B16.4) escaped in October 1917 and later returned to France with the AIF artillery: see Burgess, p 35.

the guards controlled the camps, they probably gained more from these books than did the POWs.⁶³

⁶³ See Vance, p 87, and AJ Evans: 'Escape and Liberation 1940-1945' (Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, London, 1945) pp 11-12.

CHAPTER 7

WOUNDED AND SICK PRISONERS

International agreements

During the First World War, two Conventions governed the treatment of the sick and wounded; the German and British Governments signed bilateral agreements on the subject in 1917 and 1918. It remains one of the areas where German treatment of POWs was most deficient.¹

The Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field was signed at Geneva on 6 July 1906 ('the Geneva Convention'). Article I stated that 'persons officially attached to armies, who are sick or wounded, shall be respected and cared for, without distinction of nationality, by the belligerent in whose power they are.'

The Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land ('The Hague Convention') was signed at The Hague on 18 October 1907. Chapter III, Section I of the Annex to the Convention contained only Article XXI:

The obligations of belligerents with regard to the sick and wounded are governed by the Geneva Convention.

In July 1917, the Agreement between the British and German Governments concerning Combatant and Civilian Prisoners of War was signed at The Hague. Reached under the provisions of Article II of the Geneva Convention, it provided for revised medical examinations for the seriously ill and wounded with a view to repatriation according to a new schedule of disabilities. It also allowed men who had been POWs for at least 18 months, and were suffering from 'barbed wire disease', to be interned in neutral countries. Many of the AIF were to benefit from this agreement.²

A further agreement, signed at The Hague in July 1918, extended the scope of the 1917 document and introduced further provisions for the repatriation and internment of POWs. In particular, it allowed for the resumption of visits to camps by

¹ The other was work: see Chapter 5.

² See Chapter 4 for 'barbed wire disease', and Chapter 8 for internment and exchange.

Travelling Medical Commissions which could make decisions in accordance with the schedule of disabilities agreed between the two Governments.³

Experiences of the AIF

More than half of the AIF in the Sample were wounded when captured, notably at Fromelles and Bullecourt, and others were injured or became ill during their captivity: the largest group in the Sample. Many of the Statements included material about their treatment; one story among many is revealing.⁴

Pte WJ Baldock (21st Bn) was paralysed in August 1916. His mates thought he was dead and put him into an old dugout; after five days, he was found by a German officer and four men. He was carried back to a dressing station in their third line and kept there for a further three days, receiving 'very good treatment'. Carried back to a church behind the lines, he was searched; very little of his property was to be returned to him. Taken to hospital, he received 'excellent treatment', with plenty of food and bed clothes, but the two postcards he sent home did not arrive.

The journey by Red Cross train to Germany took 36 hours during which the treatment was 'pretty fair'. At hospital, the treatment was 'very rough': the food was 'scarcely sufficient for bare existence' and medical attention irregular. He was not in Germany long enough to receive parcels. Although the paralysis seems not to have been permanent, Baldock was interned in Switzerland from December 1917.⁵

Few of the seriously wounded and sick were consistently ill-treated, and most such as Baldock and Pte V Mullin (7th Bn) were exchanged to the UK quickly, or interned in a neutral country.⁶

Nevertheless, there were differences in the treatment that the sick and wounded of the AIF received. While the standard of care immediately behind the German line was generally very high, treatment in the hospital trains to Germany was not consistent. Treatment in the hospitals there was sometimes very poor, in some cases with consequences for the wounded men. Many commented on the lack of

³ Agreement between the British and German Governments concerning Combatant Prisoners of War and Civilians.

⁴ As pointed out in Chapter 2, medical treatment and food were the most prevalent references in the Statements.

⁵ AWM 30: B6.16(1)/RC POW Box 10. His right arm remained 'practically useless'. Many of the places marked on the map accompanying this Study had hospitals to which Australians were sent.

⁶ Mullin was blinded at Pozieres in August 1916, arrived in the UK on 8 December 1916 and left for Australia on 15 February 1918: AWM 30: B5.21/RC W 1850407.

anaesthetics and the use of paper bandages in German medical facilities, the direct consequence of the many shortages in wartime Germany.⁷

Given the level of detail in their Statements, it is sometimes difficult to know how seriously wounded some men were, especially the officers. Inevitably, there were complaints about sick ORs being marked for work by German doctors, but there were few suggestions that those that had been seriously wounded were hustled out to work before they had recovered.⁸

Late in 1918, when pneumonic influenza was prevalent in some of the lagers and commandos, little could be done for any of the men who were ill. A number died.

Cull's experiences have again been set out in some detail, as he was one of the few who had been seriously wounded to publish his story.

Immediately after capture

When they fell under German control, or at the end of fighting, seriously wounded Australians were collected and carried back to dressing stations where their wounds were dressed, and then sent to hospitals behind the Front Line, before going to hospitals in Germany. In any of these places, the treatment they received could vary considerably.

A soldier from 29th Bn, wounded in the head and both thighs, 'had a couple of smokes to keep my "pecker" up, but must have swooned.' Two days later, German soldiers carried him in an oil sheet about four kilometres to a hospital, where the treatment and operations were all that could be expected. He was sent to Germany two months later.⁹

The experiences of two officers at Bullecourt were similar. A 13th Bn captain was wounded in the left ankle and only able to walk with difficulty. Bean said that two captured German medical orderlies 'carefully tended' AIF wounded in a dugout. After dark, they were removed by other German medical personnel who handled them 'very brutally, having no regard' for their wounds. At a CCS, he was not given enough anaesthetic for an operation; regaining consciousness, he was held down until the surgery was finished.¹⁰

⁷ See Chapter 3.

⁸ See Chapter 5.

⁹ AWM: B16.1, Pte B Ross. The Statements included many examples of what Paul Fussell called 'high diction': see 'The Great War and Modern Memory' (OUP, New York, 1975), pp 21-22.

¹⁰ AWM 30: B13.5, Capt DP Wells. See OH, Vol IV, p 325.

Another officer had his right leg ‘badly smashed’. He crawled to a dugout and, when the Germans ‘swarmed over’, they captured about 20 men, mostly wounded. The unwounded were removed but the rest, all badly wounded, were left in the dugout for two days ‘without any attention whatever’. He demanded to be attended to and moved from the Front Line. This had no effect until he wrote to the officer in charge of the German unit; he was to be the only one moved to a dressing station.¹¹

A 47th Bn man, wounded in the elbow at Dernancourt, received good treatment immediately after capture. On his way to the rear, however, he asked some Germans for a drink. In return they asked who he was; on being told, they punched him in the face and told him not to make a noise, on pain of being bayoneted. He was not impressed with the medical treatment further behind the line.¹²

Behind the lines and into Germany

In hospitals behind the German lines, there was a mixture of care and brutality. A 32nd Bn soldier, wounded in the chest and shoulder, was treated ‘like a dog’, so that an orderly broke his arm.¹³

Wounded under the left knee, a 16th Bn man was carried to a dugout and searched for bombs. No further notice was taken of him for the next two days, when he was carried to a dressing station in a big dugout near a village. He was re-bandaged, given food and sent to Valenciennes for two weeks during which his wound was dressed twice; the food was ‘very poor’.¹⁴

Journeys from hospitals behind the lines were stressful, because of uncertainty about conditions in Germany and the treatment that was sometimes not given: one lance-corporal’s wounds were not dressed during a five day journey.¹⁵

Hospitals in Germany

Many of the wounded were to be hospitalised for the rest of their captivity, and their treatment varied considerably. In some places, elementary medical precautions were not taken and there was poor control of other (German) patients.

¹¹ AWM 30: B13.5, Lt W Stones, 13th Bn.

¹² AWM 30: B10.5, Pte V Savage. This story can be found in OH, Vol V, p 397, fn 67.

¹³ AWM 30: B16.11, Pte AT Nelligan.

¹⁴ AWM 30: B13.22, Pte ET Ensor. His Statement can be found in the section following p 200.

¹⁵ AWM 30: B13.5, L/Cpl R Wallach, 13th Bn.

At a hospital in Germany, Ensor said that the treatment was much the same as behind the line in France: the beds were dirty and attendance by medical staff was 'very poor'. All the orderlies were Russian, and the bed-ridden were supplied mostly by AIF walking-wounded. A German doctor wanted to put a ligature on an artery, but Ensor refused because he was afraid that his leg would wither from lack of blood. Because of this refusal, he was treated as an 'ordinary prisoner' and sent to a lager where, six days later, he was operated on unsuccessfully to remove a piece of metal from his leg. He stayed in that lager for nearly five months until he was exchanged.¹⁶

Stones was sent to a lazarette at Hanover where the medical treatment was 'very bad'. It was a VD hospital: operations were carried out on German soldiers and POWs on the same tables 'without any precautions whatsoever.' When he went to a camp, his wounded leg still had not healed; he was hospitalised for four months after he was interned in Switzerland.¹⁷

A 48th Bn man, wounded in the right hip at Bullecourt, was alternately dragged and carried to a dugout. After a five-hour journey, he was hospitalised for four months. Although re-banded every three or four days, he was not given surgery. 'Later I ascertained from a German Nursing Sister that the staff was only waiting for me to die, as I was in such a weak condition.'¹⁸

It took four days for a junior officer, wounded in nine places at Passchendaele, to get to northern Germany. Officers and men were separated by barbed wire and sentries. While the medical attention and treatment were good, and a doctor visited every day, VD patients were not isolated and treated themselves in the ward. There were a number of POWs from other nations, including Russia, in the hospital; wounded Germans were in a separate hut. The food was 'fairly good' and ORs were given the same rations as officers, but the Germans were given extras such as beer.¹⁹

Shortages and poor treatment

A number of the AIF complained that, just as they were operated on with insufficient or no anaesthetic, so the Germans were only able to provide paper bandages. These deficiencies were often accompanied by poor treatment.

¹⁶ AWM 30: B13.22.

¹⁷ AWM 30: B13.5.

¹⁸ AWM 30: B10.13, Pte HP Lovering. He was mentioned by Ptes FE Comery, 16th Bn (AWM 30: B13.22) and GH Wallace, 15th Bn (AWM 30: B13.18). L/Cpl PA Burge (14th Bn) was also left to die: see below.

¹⁹ AWM 30: B10.7, 2/Lt ACH Gibbs, 47th Bn.

A captain, was wounded in the left upper arm, said that ‘a little chloroform was used for bad operations’. Wounds were never washed, and his left hand was only washed at his request about seven days after his capture. Bandages were washed and reused.²⁰

A private, was wounded in the arm, was operated on after 11 days. Surgery was undertaken without anaesthetic if bones were not being touched. Before his wound healed, he experienced internal pain that he said was nephritis. Sent to a lazarette, he was not given any treatment for four months.²¹

A 16th Bn sergeant was ‘completely disabled’ when hit in the right thigh at Bullecourt. No anaesthetic was used during several operations and he was held down. Wounded prisoners were often treated ‘barbarously’: some were ‘left in their beds until they contracted awful bad-sores’. In his case, the ‘bandages of his right foot’ remained unchanged for eight weeks. Through ‘gross inattention’ and neglect, his foot was ‘in a fearful condition.’²²

A captain from 52nd Bn had two slight wounds when he was captured, and a ‘so-called’ local anaesthetic was used during minor surgery: ‘I felt the whole show and walked back to camp 20 minutes later.’ His arm was in a sling for four months and was ‘still troublesome’ when he made his Statement. Dr Muller ‘was exceedingly good’ to him at Mainz.²³

A 22nd Bn man had his right leg amputated above the knee in March 1917. The Germans were ‘desperately short’ of linen bandages and dressings: all the bandages and dressings he saw for four months came from the UK: the Germans had no gauze for dressings. Another man commented that paper bandages needed to be changed frequently, but this often happened only once per week. He also thought that there was a general shortage of bandages, lint and medicine.²⁴

Many of the AIF were most unhappy about aspects of their treatment in German hospitals. While some were irritated, like the 31st Bn captain who had to pay for x-rays and dentistry provided by French and Russian doctors, other things were more serious.²⁵

²⁰ AWM 30: B20, Capt HC Anthony, 7th Bn.

²¹ AWM 30: B6.16(1), Pte AE Hatchard, 21st Bn.

²² AWM 30: B13.22, Sgt CH Turner.

²³ AWM 30: B10.5, Capt AH Fraser. L/Cpl R Wallach, 13th Bn (AWM 30: B13.5) and Pte J Dunlea, 25th Bn (AWM 30: B6.1(1)) also mentioned the lack of anaesthetic.

²⁴ AWM 30: B17.6, Pte RJ Kelly. He had been captured with Cull in February 1917.

²⁵ AWM 30: B16.7, Capt C Mills.

A man whose leg had been amputated found that both the food and the medical treatment were bad at Douai. Sometimes it was unkind and medical attention poor: he was hit for removing a bandage from his arm; the doctor only visited once in 11 days. When he fainted on a hospital train, he was taken off and sent a hospital at Aachen where he was the 'only Englishman' among wounded Germans and civilians, including women. He was treated well and given the same food as the Germans. It was a good clean hospital and a doctor dressed his wounds every day. However, the 'Newspaper boy used to come in and spit at me.'²⁶

Some men had decidedly mixed experiences of the German medical system. A German-Australian was in hospital at Valenciennes for two months: the treatment was 'rotten'. The patients were Russian and British as well as AIF; the presence of some Germans led him to suspect that it was a VD hospital. He was then sent to a small hospital in Bavaria, where there were nine other AIF patients; on the whole, the treatment was 'very fair'. At Nuremberg, the treatment was 'not harsh but very poor indeed'.

After failing the examination to be exchanged, he refused to have an operation: he had already had four and, while they had all been 'reasonably' successful, there were always additional pieces of bone to be extracted from his arm. He was to be exchanged later.²⁷

L/Cpl PA Burge (14th Bn) was badly wounded in both legs and remembered nothing after his capture until two weeks later: 'My case was considered hopeless and I was practically left to die.' As he was helpless, he believed that he would have died but for the kind attentions of a Royal Fusilier. As soon as he received his Red Cross parcels, he fed Burge bread and milk and attended to him at all hours. For ten months, Burge received very little attention or treatment from Germans.²⁸

Consequences of poor treatment

Some of the consequences of poor treatment were serious. A 28th Bn sergeant had his leg broken and, while his account was not very detailed, muscles were cut during surgery. He would 'never able use the ankle joint properly'.²⁹

²⁶ AWM 30: B16.4, Pte S Payne, 30th Bn.

²⁷ AWM 30: B14.5, Pte N Meyer, 54th Bn.

²⁸ AWM 30: B13.11. See OH, Vol IV, p 296, fn 24, for a mention of Burge, and Chapter 2 above for his capture. He mentioned that Sgt Turner (16th Bn) was a companion in misfortune: see above.

²⁹ AWM 30: B6.9(2), Sgt AVT Green.

A man from 48th Bn was wounded in the upper left arm. In a lazarette, two RC orderlies gave the wounded very little attention; the combination of dirty instruments and neglect meant that his arm became worse. While a doctor thought that it could be saved, he went away leaving a student in charge. On the doctor's return, the arm could not be saved. The operation was to save his life, but the amputation was much higher than might have been required. The man visited the lazarette daily, then every two days; fourteen abscesses were lanced by the doctor. 'After five months of this most scandalous treatment', he was transferred to a lager. He was an invalid and did not work until he was exchanged.³⁰

For three months, a 46th Bn man wounded in the back and the left leg was neglected, and got 'blood poisoning' in his foot. At a lager, he was treated 'no better'. When he complained to a German doctor, he was punched in the face and marked for work: he did not know the doctor's name. 'I did not work.' He was sufficiently impaired to be sent to officers' lagers as an orderly until the Armistice.³¹

Near the end of the war, there were delays to treatment; it is no surprise that anaesthetics were not available. A junior engineer officer received a compound fracture to his right leg on 5 October 1918. On 25 October, he underwent surgery; no anaesthetic was given. Because the fracture had not been set quickly enough, one of his legs was two inches shorter than the other. After the Armistice, Belgians took over the hospital in Liege and gave 'very kind treatment to all the British troops'.³²

Good treatment

Others were able to report a better standard of treatment. A man from 28th Bn, wounded in the head by shrapnel in July 1916, found food at a lazarette 'wretched stuff altogether'. In other respects the treatment was good: the nurses were 'kind' and 'would do anything we asked to make us more comfortable.' He must have been badly wounded, as he was exchanged and back in London on 8 December 1916. A report by the ARCS noted that his leg slightly paralysed but 'improving fast'.³³

A 48th Bn NCO had his right hip shattered in October 1917. Two days later, he was on a hospital train for three days to the lazarette attached to a camp. Both the treatment and the food on the train were good, with German orderlies to attend to

³⁰ AWM 30: B10.13, Pte TM Forbes.

³¹ AWM 30: B10.4, Pte JJ Garner.

³² AWM 30: B17.16, 2/Lt JW Peacock, 2nd Pnr Bn.

³³ AWM 30: B6.9(2)/RC W File 2070204.

patients' needs. He was to remain for five months, and had no complaints about either the treatment or the attention there. A German doctor, the medical specialist at this camp, 'was a good man' and he treated 'all our boys very well.'

This man developed thrombosis: both legs swelled 'to an abnormal size' and, in great pain, he was given three days to live. He managed to 'pull round' on the third day, but the pain lasted for a fortnight; during that time, he was given ten injections of morphia. In March 1918, he was interned in Holland.³⁴

A 47th Bn man, captured unwounded in April 1918, was used for general fatigue work at a field hospital for about three weeks. He caught a severe cold and was feeling very sick: his lungs were affected. Diagnosed with pleurisy, he was hospitalised for five weeks, treated well and given milk, eggs and wine 'frequently'. At the end of May, he was sent to hospital for three weeks and examined by a lung specialist who diagnosed TB. He was put on a special diet until a new doctor ordered him to get up and he was sent to Germany.³⁵

Especially if their previous treatment had been poor, the Australians were unstinting in their praise of good work from individual doctors and nurses. A 15th Bn man, wounded in the right arm and left leg, was in hospital for three months, in which time he only had one bath. He was 'chatty', had had only one change of bedding and had stolen that. The doctor was very good, and 'made a good job' of his arm. He added: 'In passing, I would like to mention particularly one little German sister who was in the hospital at Verdun. She was absolutely the best I met in Germany. She would do everything possible for the lads, often at the risk of being found out herself.'³⁶

A soldier from 16th Bn had his leg amputated a few days after Bullecourt. Seven or eight weeks later, he was sent on a three-day journey to a hospital where a 'good many' AIF wounded were evidently sent. This was 'the best German hospital I was ever in.' German sisters attended to the wounded, and there were sufficient doctors.³⁷

After being severely wounded in the abdomen at Dernancourt, a 52nd Bn private had a mixture of experiences in captivity, but good medical treatment. While his wound was still open, he was on commando at a carbide factory when he scalded

³⁴ AWM 30: B10.7, Cpl GM Dunk.

³⁵ AWM 30: B10.5. He was to die in August 1923: OH, Vol V, p 396, fn 67.

³⁶ AWM 30: B13.18.

³⁷ AWM 30: B13.22.

his foot. Sent to hospital, the medical treatment there was ‘very fair’ and he noted that Dr Saco, an Italian, ‘worked unceasingly for 24 hours on end at times.’³⁸

Bean used one of the stories of special care in the OH. After Bullecourt, Pte AJ Moore (15th Bn) worked behind the lines under Allied shell fire, often for 14 hours per day. About the end of June 1917, he was rested for a week before his group was split into working parties and sent to different places. Three months later, he was admitted to hospital, suffering from ‘general debility’.

He was attended by Princess Marie of Bavaria, Sister Marie Ilka von Wrede: ‘It was through her kindness and gentle treatment that my life was saved. She gave me extra treatment on her own initiative.’ Sent to another hospital before he had recovered fully, he said that, within five days, ten men had asked to be sent out to work: they knew that the food on commando was better than in the lager.³⁹

Perhaps surprisingly, at least two of the AIF were able to understand some of their enemy’s problems, even if their views were qualified. Wounded in the thigh at Pozieres in July 1916, a 28th Bn soldier was taken to a German trench the next morning, and then to a dressing station where his leg was put into a splint. He found the treatment in Germany ‘very good’. He received ‘a fair amount’ of medical attention, but his wound would not heal because of the time that had elapsed before he was given proper medical treatment.⁴⁰

A 47th Bn officer ‘was consistently treated as well as I consider the Germans had it in their power to treat me.’ In hospital in Belgium for three weeks, and at Lubeck for over four months, he had ‘nothing to complain of’. He thought, however, that the soldiers in the same hospital were poorly fed, and that their wounds were often badly dressed.⁴¹

In camps and on commandos

While ORs were on commandos, they were often worked hard and fed poorly; even in officers’ camps, the treatment varied and a surprising number of the AIF were rescued by sympathetic doctors.

³⁸ AWM 30: B10.5, Pte MJ O’Halloran.

³⁹ AWM 30: B13.18. See OH, Vol IV, p 343, fn 189.

⁴⁰ AWM 30: B6.9(2)/RC W File 2740803, Pte A Thorp. See Chapter 3 for his comments on the food he received, and Chapter 8 for his internment.

⁴¹ AWM 30: B10.7, Lt JDA Collier.

Pte LH Barry (1st Fd Coy Engrs) was wounded by grenade splinter in the lung when he was captured in November 1916. In March 1917, he was sent on commando felling and dressing timber. This was his 'worst spin' in Germany: ordered to work, he was 'deplorably weak' from dysentery and the German doctor knew this. There was no food but, after a month, his parcels arrived with some back issues. He was then on a railway commando and 'offered' more such work. Because of his condition, a sympathetic German doctor put him on house fatigues and, with 'a soft job', he was able 'to recuperate wonderfully'.⁴²

The Germans could be receptive to some complaints about bad treatment. Following 'brutal treatment' by a doctor, a man was bashed by a German corporal. He was taken to a doctor, made a complaint and the corporal was 'sent up the line'.⁴³

After months of working behind the lines, a man who had been slightly wounded was sent on commando. For two months, he was hospitalised after an appendix operation. 'During that time, I never received a dose of medicine, a Russian orderly looking after me.' He was sent back to the lager with the incision still raw and marked as fit for work by a German doctor. He appealed to a Russian doctor, and was re-admitted to hospital for two months. After he left hospital, he worked in the store at the lager.⁴⁴

Cull's experiences

During his stay in a hospital outside Bapaume, Capt WA Cull (22nd Bn) was another man that was not expected to live. He was taken from the ward for the seriously wounded, so as not to disturb or dishearten others and, in accordance with the practice, offered an overdose of morphia 'to anticipate the impending end.' Still alive in the morning, he was taken back to the ward.

After six days, he was taken to another hospital. Still paralysed by his wounds, he was the 'only Britisher' in this place and an object of curiosity. Cull was examined by a surgeon who was 'most kind in his attention': a marked exception to others, particularly a replacement who proved to be 'one of the most absolute beasts' the patient had ever encountered. While the professional methods may have been correct, these were coupled with 'the deliberate intention to torture'. A German soldier in the

⁴² AWM 30: B5.53. See also his memoir: Mitchell Library Mss 695.

⁴³ AWM 30: B13.22, Pte C Eriksen, 16th Bn. He said that he still felt the effects of the bashing.

⁴⁴ AWM 30: B13.5/RC W File 0350505, Pte JE Benson, 13th Bn.

next bed was distressed by the surgeon's treatment of the helpless Australian. When Cull asked if his mattress might be shaken out, the surgeon 'flew into a rage' and told him that it was good enough for him, and that he was lucky to be alive. Later, four orderlies 'furtively' brought a new mattress and one of them ransacked another man's kit for a small parcel of sugar for Cull's coffee.⁴⁵

To his relief, on 15 March 1917, Cull was taken to Germany. While wounded Germans were put on the train immediately, his stretcher was dropped into about six centimetres of snow and he was left there for nearly an hour. A bitterly cold wind was blowing; he only wore a cotton shirt and was covered by a single cotton blanket. To be moved onto the train, he was simply gripped by the back of the neck and the legs, carried and 'pitched' into bed.

During the three-day journey, he encountered a Red Cross nurse whom he found to be 'German in every fibre'. He was taken into the operating car for an examination: one of the doctors laughed, seeming to enjoy seeing an enemy so badly wounded. Cull refused the brandy he was offered and was told that he must drink it or it would be poured down his throat. His eyes were covered while he was being 'very decently' bandaged.⁴⁶

When he reached Karlsruhe, Cull was able with great difficulty to walk from the station to the hotel used as a reception centre for officers. He asked when his still-open wounds would be dressed; the doctor who was summoned to treat him was surprised that he had taken such a long journey in such a state. Carried on a stretcher to the officers' lager, the first doctor he saw was 'decent' but 'a bit careless'.⁴⁷

He told of two other POWs: one that had been neglected so long that his wounds were fly-blown, the other whose bandage was not touched for ten days and, as a result, had his arm amputated close to the shoulder. While at Karlsruhe, and thanks to lying in the sun, Cull's major wound began to heal. In July 1917, it appeared that those who had lost a leg or an eye, or were tubercular or paralysed, would be repatriated. There was a delay, blamed on 'England', and it was not until the end of December that he arrived in Switzerland.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ W Ambrose Cull: 'At All Costs' (Australasian Authors' Agency, Melbourne, 1919), pp 91-93, 94-95, 98-99. See also AWM 30, B17.6. Cull was captured at Le Sars on 25 February 1917.

⁴⁶ *ibid*, pp 102, 103. He did not give details of what the nurse said or did.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, pp 142, 144-145, 152.

⁴⁸ *ibid*, pp 152, 153, 161; AWM 30: B17.6. See Chapter 8 for Cull's experiences in Switzerland.

A professional's view

S/Sgt A Webb (AAMC, AN&MEF) was captured on the SS *Matunga* when it was captured by a German raider near Rabaul in August 1917. When he reached Germany in March 1918, he was sent to a lager and held for seven weeks before being sent to work in the lazarette. The TB ward was only about nine metres from the ward, and those patients wandered among others in the grounds. He confirmed that in many cases operations were done with no anaesthetic, and that he had seen many carried out in a 'brutal way'. He was at another lager for a few days, commenting that because the Germans took charge of 'all English medicines and bandages' this accounted for 'the rotten state of affairs'.

Russian and Italian prisoners did not receive Red Cross parcels and were given inadequate rations. They were starving and in such a weak condition that many died of exhaustion. Webb stated simply: 'We could not possibly help them without sacrificing our own men.' His AAMC status enabled his exchange; he arrived at Boston on 13 October 1918 and was reported to be 'well but nervy'.⁴⁹

ARCS material supplemented Webb's story. What he did not mention was the near-loss of his left arm as a result of dressing the wounded: a bad cut became gangrenous. A 'splendid German surgeon' saved his arm and hand; although the latter was 'somewhat deformed' and the arm withered, he was 'getting better.'⁵⁰

Accidents

A number of Australians were injured, some seriously, in accidents at work or while being moved by the Germans. On commando, a man was in an iron mine for the night shift. While he was pushing a wagon, it collided with another, crushing his foot. Blood poisoning in old wounds resulted and, after two operations, his leg was amputated below the knee.⁵¹

A man from 16th Bn was sent to work behind the lines with over 200 'British' soldiers, of whom only two or three were AIF. 'Dropsy' was a common complaint in working parties, and he was hospitalised for a fortnight. Weakened from a 'starvation diet', he was 'very seriously injured': pulling a heavy truck, he stumbled and his foot was crushed. It was to be amputated later. He was treated very well in a military

⁴⁹ AWM 30, B17.1/RC W 2880906. See also Cull's comments, *ibid*, p 130, on the condition of Russian POWs.

⁵⁰ RC POW, Box 221.

⁵¹ AWM 30: B6.3(1), Pte BE Hoult, 26th Bn.

hospital and given anaesthetics during two operations, but discipline was severe and harsh at another military hospital. He believed that 'POWs who have been injured while in Germany find it very hard to get out of that country.'⁵²

While working behind the lines, a fly wheel fell on an 11th Bn man, breaking his lower left arm and crushing his right foot and lower left leg. The toes on his right foot and the left leg below knee were later amputated. The food in hospital nearby was good, and he was on a special diet. After his transfer to Germany, he received irregular attention and the food was 'rotten'; at the lazarette, there was practically no medical attention.⁵³

For a POW to be injured by his own side was ironic, especially if he had been unwounded when captured: this was the experience of at least two men. Captured at Bullecourt, a 14th Bn NCO was 'immediately set to work behind lines.' In early June 1917, he was with a group of about 40 Australians building wooden huts when two British planes bombed the site; he was wounded in the right side, through the lung. For the next seven weeks or so, he was hospitalised in various places before being sent to a lager. He was not injured seriously enough for internment or exchange and remained in Germany until the Armistice.⁵⁴

Captured unwounded at Dernancourt on 5 April 1918, Pte C Darragh (47th Bn) was sent on commando for railway construction work. On 8 August, the Germans moved the camp and, travelling with German transport, the column was bombed by Allied aircraft. Darragh was wounded in the left leg and head; his right leg was smashed and later amputated. He was taken to a nearby hospital and then to Germany. As he gave few details of his medical treatment, it must have been adequate. He was to be exchanged via Holland in October 1918.⁵⁵

Deceiving the Germans

Although there was great pressure to make ORs work, some Australians were able to abuse the German medical system to avoid it. At least one man was able to leave Germany on spurious grounds.

L/Cpl JW Pitts (50th Bn) was captured in August 1916, dazed but unwounded after being blown up by a shell. He was sent to a receiving station for five weeks,

⁵² AWM 30: B13.22, Pte J Wallbank. He did not say when the accident happened.

⁵³ AWM 30: B5.44, Pte WP Griffiths. See Chapter 3 for an account of the food he received in hospital.

⁵⁴ AWM 30: B13.11.

⁵⁵ AWM 30: B10.5. Darragh described this accident as an 'unfortunate mishap'.

doing no work: 'the treatment was not too bad'. At the end of September, with 500 others, he was sent to a lager and was there for nearly six months, shamming sickness to escape work. Even so, life was hard and, because of insufficient food, he became weak. On 17 March 1917, a stricter medical examination saw him sent on commando, laying railway plate.⁵⁶

At Munster, after two unsuccessful escape attempts, a British soldier provided a document stating that he had seen Barry have 'epileptic fits'. Put 'under surveillance' for some days, he gave the fits a 'flutter', each time 'recovering' before the guards arrived. He was classified as unfit for work of any kind and put on the list for Aachen, where he was exchanged in February 1918.⁵⁷

After working behind the lines, a soldier from 13th Bn was admitted to hospital with 'general debility and weakness' from bad and insufficient food. He received no special treatment or medicine, but was given better food. About three weeks after he was hospitalised, enteric fever broke out among the Germans; they were isolated within the hospital. When he recovered, he was sent to work, laying gas pipes, unloading barges and general farm work: 'I was not badly treated.' For four months, he was again hospitalised: he had persuaded a Canadian doctor working on parole to admit him. Sent on a farm commando for six weeks to Dortmund, he 'had a row' with the farmer and was sent back to a lager.⁵⁸

A 4th Pnr Bn man, captured in April 1918, seems to have baffled the Germans. He was sent to a number of places, 'successfully feigning malaria during the whole of that period.' The medical treatment was 'fair', and the general treatment was 'not bad'. ARCS papers added to his story. On 5 June 1918, he was well 'except for an attack of fever that is not bad' and expecting to be sent to farm or mine. On 14 August, he was still expecting to be sent on commando but, on 24 August, said that for the last three months he had been in an observation hospital with an intermittent fever that had become chronic. He asked the RC to have 'the kindness to send quinine capsules'.⁵⁹

It is difficult to know what to make of the claims about malaria. Because correspondence was censored, to keep up his deception he may have had to include

⁵⁶ AWM 30: B10.20. See Chapter 2 for his capture and Chapter 6 for his escape to Holland.

⁵⁷ AWM 30: B5.53. See Chapter 6. He did not include any more detail about this document. In his memoir, he stated that a 'mate' substantiated his claim: Mitchell Library, Mss 695, p 36.

⁵⁸ AWM 30: B13.5, Pte JW Johnston. He escaped into Holland in October 1918.

⁵⁹ AWM 30: B10.5/RC W 1430408: Pte CE Jeffrey.

the request for quinine. Had he been seriously ill, he would have had a better chance of exchange; this was not mentioned in his Statement, or in his RC files.

The influenza pandemic of 1918/1919

Some of the AIF suffered from the pneumonic influenza pandemic of 1918-1919, when Germany was suffering severe shortages of medical and other items. There were a number of serious cases and some deaths among the AIF POWs, even after their return to the UK.⁶⁰

From mid-October 1918 until after the Armistice, an officer captured in September 1918 was at a new camp at Cologne. Medical attention was 'very bad': of a total of 276 officers, 173 officers, and 49 of 53 orderlies, were sick at one time; five officers and six orderlies died. The cause was not given, but it was probably the 'flu. Although he was not at either place for very long, he also commented on the medical attention available: at Rastatt it was 'poor', at Karlsruhe 'fairly good'.⁶¹

A man from 47th Bn worked on a farm commando for most of 1918 and, returning to his lager on 1 December, contracted 'la grippe'. Sent to the lazarette, he was discharged 'still uncured' on 23 December and went by hospital train to Stettin. He arrived in the UK, via Copenhagen, on 27 December.⁶²

Another soldier became ill about 11 November and on arrival in Holland was sent to hospital in Rotterdam. From 19 December, he was to be hospitalised for eight days in London, returning to Australia in March 1919.⁶³

The 'flu also seems to have been bad in northern Germany, and a number of the AIF contracted it at Altdamm: four Australians were reported to have died while on commando from that lager. A man from 48th Bn was there before his release and, on his return to the UK about 18 December, was admitted to hospital in Hull.⁶⁴

ARCS records show that an 18th Bn soldier arrived in the UK on 1 December and was admitted to hospital with the 'flu until 24 December. He was on leave for a month but, on 28 March 1919, was re-admitted to hospital until 15 June.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ See OH M, Vol III, Chapter IV, pp 190-218, for a discussion of the pandemic that, around the world, caused a high death rate among young adults. There were a number of names for this 'flu.

⁶¹ AWM 30: B16.15, LtCol TR Marsden, 5th MG Bn. He seems to have been at each place for only about ten days.

⁶² AWM 30: B10.7, Pte DL Hampson.

⁶³ AWM 30: B5.44, Pte A Musgrove, 11th Bn.

⁶⁴ AWM 30: B13.5, Cpl RB Goulder, 13th Bn; B10.13, Pte N McLeod.

⁶⁵ RC W 0010305, Pte G Abbott. He left for Australia in the middle of July. See Chapter 9 for the impact of the 'flu on the return of the AIF to Australia.

Conclusions

Proper treatment of the wounded and sick was an obligation placed on the belligerents by both the Geneva and The Hague Conventions. It seems that, at least for British/Australian POWs, Germany sought to honour both the letter and the spirit of these documents. There were, of course, many examples in the Statements of poor, harsh or inappropriate treatment that did not assist recovery.

The treatment individuals received appears to have been a matter of luck, as were the camps or commandos to which some were later sent. AIF wounded at Fromelles and Bullecourt waited for varying periods to be moved from the battle field or for their wounds to be dressed, but there were many men to be collected and moved. Close to the battlefield and in Germany itself, some were given surgery without anaesthetic or given an inadequate amount and, for many, there were only paper bandages for their wounds. Both reflected shortages in Germany.⁶⁶

Those injured in accidents during captivity seemed to get prompt and appropriate care. Wallbank asserted that, although well-treated, those injured in Germany had difficulty in leaving the country. In fact, that group seemed to have left as early and easily as could be expected, especially if they could not work as a result of their injuries. Of the five Statements referred to, only Roberts remained until the Armistice.

There were inconsistencies in the treatment of some individuals, and there seems to have been an amount of unnecessary suffering. Cull's book included detail not found in most Statements, but he emphasised anything to the discredit of the Germans.

Treatment in some hospitals was worse than in others, and this does not seem to be related to the date of capture. Many wounds were dressed by untrained personnel, often Russian orderlies: the presence of trained nursing staff was a matter for comment. It is also true that, from the middle of 1918, the 'flu was so severe that no amount of care was going to save some patients.

After a brief comment on Ensor, his Examiner added a Further Note, relating mainly to the treatment of unwounded prisoners. As a result of his examination of returned, wounded 'British' POWs, Charles F Martelli formed the impression that the

⁶⁶ See Chapter 3.

wounded did not need the attention of the British Government: ‘they seem to be treated humanely for the most part, at any rate by the German surgeons.’⁶⁷

Material from the Sample tended to support this observation, although there clearly were brutal doctors and some marked men fit for work when they were not. Often it was the non-German doctors that were mentioned favourably: the Russian doctor that re-admitted Benson to hospital, the Italian doctor O’Halloran said worked so hard, or the Canadian doctor who allowed Johnston to remain in hospital.

Even if Martelli was correct, it is clear that treatment varied. The removal of Stones from the dugout and Collier’s treatment in hospital at Lubeck suggested that rank mattered. Capt JE Mott (48th Bn) noted that, although they were well-treated, the ORs did not receive the same amount of food as officers in hospital at Hameln.⁶⁸

Quite a number of German-Australians became POWs, and some were exchanged or interned. Most only had slight wounds, recovered, were sent to work and duly arrived back in the UK in November/December 1918. Wiese’s experience seems to have been exceptional, as the other wounded German-Australians do not seem to have been treated any differently to others in the AIF.

Regardless of any deficiencies in German treatment of the AIF, every aspect of the treatment of the Russians was quite different to that of other Allied POWs. Webb’s words about the Russians are chilling. If German treatment of the AIF could generally be excused because of the various shortages, that of the vast number of Russian POWs was another matter.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ AWM 30: B13.22. See Chapter 5.

⁶⁸ See Chapter 3.

⁶⁹ See Chapter 1 for an indication of the number of Russians taken by the Germans. Some Statements also mentioned harsh treatment of Italian POWs.

CHAPTER 8

EXCHANGE AND INTERNMENT

Conventions and agreements

During the First World War, two international conventions governed the general treatment of POWs. These were supplemented by a number of bilateral agreements between belligerents.¹

At The Hague on 2 July 1917, the British and German Governments signed an Agreement concerning Combatant and Civilian Prisoners of War, principally dealing with internment of invalids in neutral countries.²

Paragraph 4 provided that men, POWs for at least 18 months, suffering from ‘barbed wire disease’ would be suitable for internment in a neutral country. If, after being interned for three months, a considerable improvement in their health was not observable, the disease would be treated as serious and the subject was entitled to be considered for repatriation.

Paragraph 11 provided that:

All officers and NCOs irrespective of rank or number, and whether under punishment or not, so soon as they have been in captivity at least eighteen months shall, so far as they do not express desire to remain, be interned in Switzerland or other neutral country, subject always to the possibility of accommodation being found for them, which both Governments will try to secure. The order of transfer to the neutral country shall be that of priority of capture irrespective of nationality.

This Agreement also included revised arrangements for medical examinations for internment. Once interned, if their health improved, men were ineligible for return to the UK and, as did the others in Germany, remained until after the Armistice.³

¹ See the Introduction for details of these two Conventions, and the negotiation of bilateral agreements by the belligerents, and Chapter 7 for provisions relating to the sick and wounded.

² For the text of this Agreement, see Edward Parkes with the assistance of John W Field and RC Thompson ‘British and Foreign State Papers 1917-1918’, Vol CXI, (HMSO, London, 1921), pp 257-267.

³ For example, Pte V Mullin (7th Bn), blinded at Pozieres in August 1916, was exchanged and arrived in the UK on 8 December 1916, returning to Australia in February 1918 (AWM 30: B5.21). Pte CG Beresford (51st Bn), wounded in September 1916, was interned in Switzerland from December 1916 to December 1918. His health improved during this time (AWM 30: B11.3/RC POW Box 16). His UK Statement can be found in the section following p 200.

In July 1918, the two Governments signed another Agreement which varied the provisions of the 1917 document for the internment and exchange of POWs and the necessary medical examinations.⁴

In particular, visits by Travelling Medical Commissions, made up of two neutral doctors and one from the captor nation, were to resume visits to camps every three months. Help Committees were recognised in the camps and, more importantly, in working parties, and were given a role in providing the names of those eligible for repatriation or internment in neutral countries.⁵

By supplementing the provisions in 1907 Convention, the belligerents showed their willingness to negotiate more satisfactory agreements for 'humane treatment' for POWs. It was ironic that, because of disagreements between the parties, the 1918 Agreement was never implemented fully.⁶

The AIF in Holland and Switzerland

Because of the seriousness of their wounds, some of the AIF were exchanged and sent to the UK as early as December 1916; others began to go to neutral countries to be interned at about the same time. From the Sample, 115 men were exchanged through Holland and 66 were interned, either in Holland or Switzerland. Although both nations were neutral, neither could escape the impact of the war.

Before 1914, almost half of all Holland's exports went to Germany, and its demand for Dutch goods and agricultural products rose during the conflict. Unless Germany received food from Holland, it would not export coal in return. If the Dutch had exported all that they could to Germany, the Allies might have retaliated by restricting grain and other imports to Holland.⁷

There were also German-Swiss economic ties before the war, as well as many close racial/cultural links. Switzerland exported considerable amounts of finished

⁴ Agreement between the British and German Governments concerning Combatant Prisoners of War and Civilians, signed at The Hague 14 July 1918. For the text, see Parkes *et al*, pp 279-310.

⁵ *ibid*, Articles XV, LI and XVI.

⁶ Richard B Speed III: 'Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War: A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity' (Greenwood Press, New York, 1990), p 42. See Chapter 5 for variations to provisions relating to work for POWs. Desmond Morton: 'Silent Battle: Canadian Prisoners of War in Germany 1914-1918' (Lester Publishing, Toronto, 1992), p 129.

⁷ Hubert P van Tuyll van Serooskerken: 'The Netherlands and World War 1: Espionage, Diplomacy and Survival' (Brill, Leiden, 2001), p 10.

goods to Germany, and resisted Allied attempts to add items that contained raw materials such as copper to the list of material forbidden by the Allied blockade.⁸

For many soldiers, internment was not seen as much of an improvement on their previous experiences in Germany. While the overall treatment was good, many of the Australians were not impressed with the food they received in Switzerland. It was difficult for ORs largely recovered from wounds or illness to find suitable work, or to arrange suitable training. A 1917 British report dealt with many of the issues of internment that also faced the Australians.

Those exchanged through Holland were usually there for only a few days. Even late in the war, Australians in transit were impressed by the reception from the Dutch, but internees were as critical of the food there as were those in Switzerland. A Canadian report from 1918 gave a more detailed picture of conditions in Holland than was available from Australian sources.

For men that had survived wounds and/or illness, POW camps, work on commandos and internment, there was another problem in Switzerland in 1918: pneumonic influenza.⁹

AIF administration

After the 1917 Agreement between the British and German Governments, the number of men being interned may have grown so that the War Office had to increase its staff in these countries, and the AIF followed this practice. Reports from the designated officers covered a range of subjects, including illness, discipline and work undertaken in Switzerland.

In June 1918, the Commandant of the AIF's Administrative HQ, London, informed AIF HQ in France that 'War Office sanction has been obtained to the appointment in Switzerland and Holland of the Senior Australian Officers interned as AIF representatives.' The two officers were to work under the supervision of 'the British Officers in Charge interned.' They were to obtain and forward information about interned members of the AIF and, where possible, those still in Germany. Sources of information in London about internees were 'necessarily limited' and

⁸ Gerd Hardach: 'The First World War 1914-1918' (Allen Lane, London, 1977, first published in German 1973), p 21.

⁹ This was sometimes called the '(la) Grippe': see Chapter 7.

Administrative HQ was 'particularly desirous' to obtain news as early as possible about the welfare, location and movements of the AIF's internees.¹⁰

The War Office advised the AIF's Administrative HQ that 'Capt Dunworth, Australian Infantry has taken up his duties as representative of the Australian Expeditionary Force (*sic*) in Holland.' This 15th Bn officer 'was quite recently communicated with in Holland in this connection', and he was watching the interests of Australians interned there.

Early in July 1918, Maj JJ Hughes (32nd Bn) informed 'The Officer in Charge, Australian Imperial Force' in London of his arrival in Holland, and that he was the senior AIF officer in that country. He noted that ten officers and 80 NCOs/men were interned there, of whom one officer and four ORs were in hospital. He began this series of reports by dealing with such issues as: personnel, quarters, clothing, promotion of subalterns, refusal of internment and officers' dress.¹¹

The Administrative HQ letter to the AIF in France had also noted that Capt C Mills (31st Bn) had been acting as AIF representative in Switzerland 'with splendid results'. As his return to the UK was imminent, the next most senior officer would take over.¹²

Mills also wrote regularly to London and, based in part on his reports, AIF Administrative HQ forwarded to the War Office lists of those seriously ill or crippled with a view to arranging repatriation or internment in a neutral country.

By establishing these positions, and posting experienced officers to them, the AIF was reacting to the numbers of men being exchanged or interned in neutral countries. The reports that Hughes and Mills sent to London supplemented the information about conditions in Switzerland and Holland that internees provided in Statements provided after their release.

To Aachen or Constance

Men were examined at Mannheim before they were sent on for exchange or for internment, and for many it was often the last place where they were held for any period in Germany. Those Australians who had been POWs for some time knew of

¹⁰ For Holland, see AWM 18, Item 9982/4/4 from June 1918, and for Switzerland: AWM 18, Item 9982/5/1 from March 1918.

¹¹ Hughes was a public servant, commissioned in the AIF from the militia in March 1915.

¹² Mills was a regular army NCO, commissioned in the AIF in August 1915.

the shortage of food there, and this helped to reinforce the contrast between the conditions they had experienced and those encountered at Aachen or Constance.

Those who passed medical examinations were then sent via Aachen for exchange to the UK or internment in Holland, or via Constance to internment in Switzerland. Many men commented that they had received better food and general treatment at these two places than they had in the lagers or hospitals in Germany.

For three weeks in December 1917, a 48th Bn man was assessed at Mannheim for internment. This was 'a very hungry time', as his parcels were not sent on to him and he had to live on the German ration and, for him, this was the worst place in Germany. For six months, he was treated well in Switzerland, at Leysin and then in the Chateau d'Oex region. The food was 'fair but not plentiful', consisting mainly of macaroni and beans. The bread ration was small, but it was 'much better' than German bread.¹³

A sergeant thought that the food at Mannheim en route to Aachen was 'very very poor.' He could not eat the soup provided for Christmas dinner, but thought that he was lucky to have bread, and then salt to kill the taste of the bread. At Aachen, a fuss was made, and female nurses were also 'greatly in evidence'. The food there was much better generally, but was intended merely to make a good impression. He received his first meal with meat since his capture: it was a very small, very old piece of lamb. 'Nevertheless everyone saw through the dodge and even with all their seeming kindness few took away a good impression of the treatment accorded' to POWs in Germany.¹⁴

When those that had been exchanged reached London, they were hospitalised and, later, allowed some leave before they were returned to Australia.

Conditions in Holland

A Canadian officer visited his country's internees in Holland in September 1918. At that time, there were about 40,000 internees of all nations in the country: about 500 officers and 4500 ORs were 'British'. Most were located in the internment camp at The Hague and in the suburb of Scheveningen.¹⁵

¹³ AWM 30: B10.13, Pte GT Williams.

¹⁴ AWM 30: B13.18, Sgt JS Tomlinson, 15th Bn.

¹⁵ 'Report of the Ministry: Overseas Military Forces of Canada 1918' (London), pp 465, 467.

Most officers were housed in several large hotels taken over by the Dutch Government. 'From all accounts', these were 'reasonably comfortable'; the quality of the food supplied was 'fair', although limited in quantity by strict rationing. ORs were billeted in 11 different groups widely scattered around The Hague and Scheveningen. The Canadians were in Group 6, known as 'the Colonial Group', with the AIF. On inspection, these billets were found to be 'fairly satisfactory'.¹⁶

The Dutch company contracted to the British Government had not fulfilled its obligations: the food was 'altogether insufficient' and often so dirty and badly prepared as to be inedible. Conditions improved when the British Government supplemented rations by providing bully-beef, meat and vegetables and biscuits.

Conditions in Holland generally were better than expected, but there were drawbacks. The cost of living was excessive: food and all commodities, services and accommodation were at least twice as expensive as in London. In spite of all its efforts, the British Red Cross Society (BRCS) had not been able to arrange suitable employment or instruction for all internees. A great many men were only employed on Group or garrison duties, occupying a short portion of each day and, for most of them, life was one of 'comparative idleness and considerable tedium.'

The AIF in Holland

Most of the AIF who went to Holland were being exchanged to the UK and only passed through the neutral country. Many commented on the reception they were given on their way through that country to the UK. Internees were first billeted in hotels, and some were critical of the amount of food in Holland.¹⁷

Three 48th Bn men were there for varying periods. Over four months, one was at a hotel and then billeted in a village; he was treated well, 'but the food was bad'. Another commented that when he was exchanged the Dutch people gave his party cigarettes, chocolates and fruit, as well as coffee and cakes. A corporal agreed, saying that the Dutch gave his party 'anything we required' when he was exchanged in October 1918.¹⁸

¹⁶ POWs from the Dominions were kept together in this Group: Pte HHV Hodson (59th Bn, AWM 30: B15.7), interned from April to August 1918. There was little to do there: Morton, p 129.

¹⁷ Cpl GM Dunk (48th Bn) was interned from April to October 1918: AWM 30: B10.7. See Pte G Hilton (21st Bn), AWM 30: B6.16(1), and Spr P Minogue (2nd ATC), AWM 30: B6.13(1).

¹⁸ AWM 30: B10.13, Ptes JA Rose and PW Symonds, Cpl JE Symonds.

While Hughes' comments on accommodation for the NCOs and men were generally favourable, he noted that the 'only complaint forthcoming' was about food: it was insufficient in quantity and not always good in quality. He added that this was a problem with all interned troops, and that the Senior British Interned Officer (SBIO) 'has the matter in hand.' The Canadian report suggests that Hughes was dismissive of a valid issue.

Conditions in Switzerland

A report compiled in 1917 highlighted shortcomings in the Swiss internment system at a time when it was said to be still 'quite experimental'. From British sources, it told a good deal about conditions when the first Australians began to arrive in that country. By June 1917, there were 1800 British POWs in Switzerland.¹⁹

Fit men were expected to work six hours per day, but were not paid. Heavy work, clearing snow under the orders of British officers and NCOs, was a particular cause of complaints. Although some men were blasting rock up 1000 metres, on top of a mountain, and others had been working on farms, there was 'no settled work' at one place. There were complaints about the food and medical treatment at the hospitals, but there was some trade training. Things were so bad at Montreux that Germans who had been in England said that they preferred camps there to those in Switzerland. Australians were sent to all these places.

In July and August 1917, the amount of work expected for small wages was an issue, as was the poorness and scarcity of food. In anticipation of winter, the compiler viewed the 'wretchedness of conditions' in Switzerland seriously.

The AIF in Switzerland

On arrival in Switzerland, former POWs were either hospitalised for further treatment, or allocated to one of a number of hotels in different parts of the country. Many stated that, while the treatment that they received was good, the food was deficient. On 21 June 1918, Mills reported to London that there were 61 AIF personnel in the country: seven officers and 54 ORs in nine locations. With one exception, there were at least three members of the AIF in each location.

¹⁹ Robert Jackson: 'The Prisoners, 1914-18' (Routledge, London and New York, 1989), pp 69-75 (*passim*). No source was provided for this report. It was not possible to assess how many were AIF.

Pte WJ Baldock (21st Bn) was not held anywhere in Germany for long and did not receive any parcels. When he reached Switzerland in December 1916, he was in hospital for ten weeks and then went to Murren until he was exchanged in December 1917. He received excellent treatment, but food 'became rather scarce'.²⁰

A man who had been largely satisfied with conditions in Germany was interned for nine months. He said that the treatment in Switzerland was very good, and that the 'only thing we had to complain about was the quality of the food.'²¹

Some of the AIF did not think that everything in Switzerland was bad. A 51st Bn soldier was interned at Leysin for seven months to June 1918 and thought that the treatment, food and accommodation there was good. Another man was interned in the Chateau d'Oex region for about the same period: 'The food and the treatment generally were good.'²²

At least one man seems to have had unrealistic standards. A 13th Bn soldier was in Switzerland for five months from October 1917. While the food was better than in Germany, and was passable in quality, it was scarce in quantity: he received meat five times per week and an additional ration of potatoes, but did not mention how big the meals were.²³

There were clearly differences between the hotels used by internees. One man said that the food at Murren was good; another stated that at first the food in the Chateau d'Oex region was good, but it became very poor towards the end of his time. Potatoes and meat were on short issue and his party was not receiving parcels, but were getting cigarettes and tobacco from the ARCS.²⁴

There was some support for complaints about the food. Mills stated that it was of good quality and 'usually sufficient to enable the men to keep in good health', but he was not totally satisfied, noting that quantity and quality varied according to the proprietors' ideas. He saw two meals at a hotel that he considered to be insufficient. Most of the men evidently said they were losing weight, presumably because of the diminished supply of fats in the food, but Mills did not believe that this was affecting

²⁰ AWM 30: B6.16(1). See Chapter 7.

²¹ AWM 30: B6.9(2), Pte A Thorp, 28th Bn. See Chapters 3 and 7 for his views on conditions in Germany.

²² AWM 30: B11.3, Pte WC Woodland, 51st Bn; B11.15, L/Cpl EA Nattrass, 4th Div Sig Coy.

²³ AWM 30: B13.5. He spent six weeks in the Chateau d'Oex region and seven weeks at Freiburg.

²⁴ AWM 30: B5.44, Pte OB Oden, 11th Bn; B13.18, Pte G Vowles, 15th Bn. It has been suggested that the 'practical incentive' of filling scores of empty tourist hotels assisted the Swiss decision to make facilities available: Morton, p 121.

their health. While he was not as dismissive as was Hughes, he seems both to have contradicted himself and to have under-estimated the problem.

Work and education

Filling in time was a problem for internees who had recovered from their wounds, or had served their 18 months in Germany. While various ways were used to keep them busy, the Statements and reports on conditions in both Holland and Switzerland suggest that these were not very successful.

In August 1918, AIF Administrative HQ asked for a nominal roll showing how Australian internees were employed, what classes they were attending and, if they were not, what action was contemplated. Hughes replied on 9 October, providing the nominal roll and the duty detail, including the various fatigues for which the AIF had to provide its quota. He also included details of the education and instruction program provided by the BRCS, a copy of its Circular and the program of classes for NCOs.

Mills was not happy about the work provided for internees. In June 1918, he secured three 'very good jobs' with a chocolate company that was planning to open a factory in Sydney and was training men for good positions there. Overall, however, he did not believe that the situation was satisfactory. About 25 per cent of the men were receiving medical treatment, another '25 per cent were doing something or other, classes etc', while the remainder were 'wasting their time.'

One of the reasons advanced for refusing to work was that it would release Swiss citizens to go to Germany and work there. Work of a kind, such as turf-cutting, was available, but very few men accepted it. Mills was not impressed by turf-cutting, 'a beast of a game', and some men were not fitted for it.

A man who spent two years in Switzerland reported that he was 'making a canal', adding that it 'puts the time in very well when you work eleven hours' per day. That he was able to undertake this work, combined with improvement in his eyesight, explained why he remained until the end of the war.²⁵

Another soldier observed that there was a dilemma for internees: it was necessary to work to fill in the time, but 'if you work you run the risk of local doctors

²⁵ RC POW Box 16: Pte CG Beresford, 51st Bn. See the letter of 18 February 1918.

turning you down when it comes to repatriation.’ He knew of a 10th Bn man who had been interned for 18 months, but was always knocked back for repatriation.²⁶

Jackson suggested that the Swiss practice of using POWs as cheap labour was not widely known during the war and that, had it been, there would have been an outcry. He pointed to the pro-German section of the population as responsible for this use of internees.²⁷

The German-Swiss

Many Swiss were sympathetic to Germany and not well-disposed to the Allies, making internment of so many Allied soldiers more noteworthy.

A man in the Chateau d’Oex region for six months to June 1918 was critical of conditions there. While medical treatment ‘was very good, medicine was scarce and the food very bad. The place was run by half-bred Germans and I don’t think we got a fair deal there’.²⁸

A soldier was at Interlaken for about the same time, including the German offensive in the spring of 1918. The treatment was ‘not bad, but when the recent great German offensive was launched the people thereabouts let you distinctly know how there (*sic*) sympathies lay’: this was ‘one of the German-Swiss areas’.²⁹

Another man, in Switzerland for about six months from early 1918, said that while the overall treatment was fair the food was poor: ‘but I believe the people gave us what they had.’ For a time he was in a hotel that was really a hospital, where the sisters and the doctor were ‘amible (*sic*) enough’. One sister was German-Swiss, ‘but she was always very decent to us.’³⁰

The influenza pandemic and other illnesses

Mills’ reports contained information on the men with the ‘Spanish’ pneumonic influenza prevalent at the end of 1918. A number of the AIF died of this illness.³¹

The worst of the ‘flu outbreak appears to have coincided with the departure of the internees from Switzerland. On 25 November, Mills informed London that of 15 Australians interned at Murren, ‘8 are now down with the “Grippe”’. The cases were

²⁶ AWM 30: B10.13, Pte J Hill, 48th Bn.

²⁷ Jackson, p 75.

²⁸ AWM 30: B11.3, Pte SCR Noell, 51st Bn.

²⁹ AWM 30: B13.18, Pte KH Smith, 15th Bn.

³⁰ AWM 30: B10.13, Pte J Hill, 48th Bn.

³¹ Men of the AIF also died of the ‘flu in Germany: see Chapter 7.

not serious but he noted that the departure of the party, scheduled for 4 December, might be delayed. On 28 November, he advised that the ‘epidemic of “Grippe”’ was increasing. There were about 400 ‘British’ interned there, including the 15 AIF.

On 8 December 1918, only nine ORs and two officers remained in Switzerland. Five of the ORs with the ‘flu were able to leave as scheduled on 20 December.

A report dated 24 August 1918 listed those in hospital in Holland: one officer and one OR had the ‘flu, while four others had more general medical problems: the effects of wounds, rheumatism, stomach trouble, or ‘strain’. Of the latter, two had been passed for repatriation. Three others were hospitalised for venereal disease.³²

The lists in the attachments to this letter also included a number of cases where members of the AIF were shown as suffering variously from ‘loss of memory & delusions’, ‘shell shock & delusions’, or as ‘mentally deranged’.

On 20 September, the case of the three members of the AIF with VD was referred to AIF Administrative HQ: the first report of personnel contracting VD while interned. It noted that the internees were not performing military duties, and that each had spent a long period of captivity in Germany. It sought a ruling about the recording of this information on the soldiers’ documents.³³

Discipline

Although disciplinary issues do not seem to have been major problems, they were raised in reports from both Holland and Switzerland.

Hughes informed London of the procedure for the treatment of Crime and Punishment. Depending on the seriousness of the matter being dealt with it would be addressed, in order, by an AIF officer, a Canadian officer in charge of a group of internees, the SBIO or the Dutch District Commandant.³⁴

Two months later, he gave details of offences committed by ORs interned in Holland. The sentences, detention at a Special Internment Camp and limits to the amount of money they could draw after release, had been awarded by the District Commandant.

³² In the cases involving VD and mental disturbances, the National Archives Office has sealed the original pages of this report, restricting access. There are a number of such exclusions in this Item, although, in another report, access to the names of two other VD patients has not been restricted.

³³ There is no reply on the file.

³⁴ This was in response to a request from London about procedures for dealing with crimes by internees.

Hughes 'regretted' to have to report offences committed by officers. One was sentenced to confinement for two months in a Special Internment Camp for drunkenness and 'conduct unbecoming to an officer'. Two others were sentenced to confinement to their hotel for seven days for 'disobeying regulations: being found in a night café at 1.30am.' These punishments were also awarded by the District Commandant. Hughes' chagrin was palpable.³⁵

Crime was gratifyingly rare in Switzerland: Mills had seen the men's conduct sheets at each 'camp' and they 'were mostly clean'. Without exception, SBOs, Swiss and YMCA officials had spoken highly of the behaviour of interned Australians.³⁶

As late as 3 February 1919, however, the War Office was passing to the AIF in London the names, crimes of, and sentences awarded to, five ORs in Switzerland. The punishments had been awarded by the Swiss military authorities in October 1918. The form on which this information was passed included a paragraph: these punishments 'should not be entered' on conduct sheets but recorded separately and shown as awarded by the Swiss authorities, 'and will not affect the soldiers pay etc'. That paragraph was struck out in this document.³⁷

Cull in Switzerland

It is no surprise that Cull was another who was not taken in by the attention given to those leaving Germany. He gave a detailed account of his internment.

En route to Switzerland, his party was given a meal for which they had to pay: meat in abundance, a big ration of bread, two bowls of over-sweetened coffee and milk. At Constance, they were given another 'fat' meal for which they were also charged: 'the Hun' was painfully anxious to make a good last impression; he did not give such impressions away, but sold them'.³⁸

That he was not going 'directly home' ceased to worry him because he was at last 'leaving Germany and all its Teutonic deviltries (*sic*) behind'. He referred to the 'yell' that arose from the prison train when it crossed into Switzerland, and the whole-hearted cheering from the crowds of Swiss at every station.³⁹

³⁵ In a report dated 11 November 1918. The names were given.

³⁶ Before he returned to the UK in June 1918, Capt DP Wells (13th Bn) also visited villages where the AIF were interned and recorded similar comments (AWM 30: B13.5).

³⁷ Emphasis in the original.

³⁸ W Ambrose Cull: 'At All Costs' (Australasian Author's Agency, Melbourne, 1919), pp 186, 184, 187. He was in Switzerland from late-December 1917 to 21 March 1918.

³⁹ *ibid*, pp 186, 187-188.

His party was taken to Montreux to further welcomes, on the platform and in the hotel. After about three weeks, he suffered a ‘complete nervous breakdown’ that lasted for about three weeks. At a New Year function, a Swiss officer referred at length to Australians, and Cull made much of freedom, the friendliness of the Swiss, and the many hospitable invitations.⁴⁰

The chief conditions of internment were a nominal curfew of midnight and a restriction to an area of eight kilometres of a billet. Internees were expected to remain in the hotel to which they were allocated, but could get leave for two or three days from Swiss authorities. They travelled on trams and trains at concession rates.⁴¹

Cull was aware of Switzerland’s difficult position as a neutral state sharing a frontier with Germany. He believed that France largely supplied Switzerland with meat and wheat in exchange for ‘milk, chocolate and goods of that sort.’ Coal and timber came from Germany, and the Swiss were not allowed to build reserve stocks of either. He pointed out that bread, butter and fats were rationed in Switzerland. Cakes made of potato were ‘particularly good’ and could be bought without a ration card.⁴²

His injuries were so serious that Swiss surgeons expressed surprise that he was still alive. They said nothing could be done for him and, when he suggested an amputation, he was told that this would kill him. Passed by a medical board for return to the UK, Cull left Switzerland on 21 March 1918. Of the 13 men examined with him, only one other had passed. This decision was discouraging: men were not sent back to the UK if it was possible to do anything for them in Switzerland. He thought that in early 1918 there was ‘an understanding’ that as many wounded as possible should be kept in Switzerland, as English ‘war hospitals’ were overcrowded.⁴³

Conclusions

The 1917 and 1918 Agreements between Britain and Germany were the means of releasing some men, POWs for more than 18 months, from Germany. While those captured in 1916 were eligible for release later in 1917, the 18-month period only expired for the larger number captured at Bullecourt as the war ended.

Once they had been passed medical examinations, arrangements for the exchange of wounded members of the AIF appear to have worked well: those

⁴⁰ *ibid*, pp 189-190, 194.

⁴¹ *ibid*, p 197.

⁴² *ibid*, pp 195, 198.

⁴³ *ibid*, pp 191, 196, 199-200.

wounded at Fromelles were being sent to the UK, or being interned in neutral countries, from late 1916. Internees often found that they had exchanged German hospitals or POW camps for the restrictions imposed by host countries.

Some of the AIF were very critical of conditions in internment, generally less so in Holland than in Switzerland, perhaps because they did not encounter a proportion of the population hostile to the Allies. This hostility may have required the Swiss to control internees more strictly than did the Dutch.

In contrast to its strong criticism of the food that had been provided, the carefully chosen words of the Canadian report of September 1918 made it clear that the Dutch facilities for both ORs and officers were not of a high standard. AIF men made few comments about accommodation, but they were critical of the shortage of food.

The war affected neutral European nations; those who were within their boundaries for any length of time felt various shortages, particularly of food. The Canadian report showed that AIF complaints about food in Holland were valid and that, on at least one occasion, measures were taken to deal with the problem.

In mid-1918, AIF officers in Holland and Switzerland were appointed to manage increasing numbers of internees and those being exchanged. These appointments seem to have reduced administrative difficulties, and ensured that AIF officers were in the chain of command. Reports from these officers revealed a good deal about conditions in these two countries, and about the authors.

As the Canadian report showed, even with the assistance of the BRCS, it seems to have been impossible to find ways of occupying the men effectively. Interned men found it difficult to occupy their time. Work was available in Switzerland, but it was not satisfactory, nor was it always suitable for men recovering from serious wounds. That it was often arduous and very poorly paid did not improve its attractions, but it occupied time.

As the 1917 British report made clear, some training was provided but, apart from references by Mills, it does not seem that the AIF made much use of it.

It is probably surprising that the internees did not cause more disciplinary problems. The 1918 report paid tribute to the good conduct of Canadian internees in Holland, and the AIF officers did not report much bad behaviour. While he was surprisingly sympathetic to men with VD, Hughes' report to London on the discipline

process in Holland was typical; Mills inspected conduct sheets and passed on the compliment about the men's behaviour.

It is debatable whether a POW was 'lucky' to be so badly wounded that he was exchanged and sent back to Australia before the war was over. After The Hague Agreement of 1917, in spite of restrictions, it was probably better to be interned in a neutral country than to have remained in Germany. Although the 1917 and 1918 bilateral agreements may not have benefited large numbers of POWs, they have been seen as innovative attempts by the belligerents to treat sick and wounded POWs in a compassionate, decent and dignified manner. There have not been any such bilateral agreements between belligerents since the First World War.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Speed, pp 184, 42, 7.

CHAPTER 9

RETURNING FROM CAPTIVITY

The collapse of the German army occurred unexpectedly, catching the Allies without adequate preparations for the return of their POWs. Hasty attempts were made to organise their return, but these were generally too late: when POWs were released, they simply made their way through the lines until they met Allied troops.¹

Article XX of the Annex to The Hague Convention of 1907 provided that, at the conclusion of peace, repatriation of prisoners 'shall be carried out as quickly as possible.' Article X of the Armistice signed on 11 November 1918 called for the 'immediate repatriation, without reciprocity' of all Allied and US POWs.²

According to a brief history of the repatriation of British POWs, from 17 November 1918 to 22 January 1919, 7176 officers and 150,847 ORs, plus 4627 civilians, were transported to the UK from Germany and the territory it had occupied. AIF POWs were only a small part of this number but, by 16 November, reception camps had been established at Ripon in Yorkshire and at Dover.³

After the Armistice, because of revolution and chaos in Germany, many AIF POWs left their camps or commandos quickly. Others were unable to leave immediately, while a few undertook special jobs before reaching the UK.

After the revolution in Germany

What started as a mutiny in the German High Seas Fleet at Kiel late in October 1918 assumed the guise of a revolution via Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. These were not particularly revolutionary bodies, demanding only limited reforms. Because many Germans were sick of the war, concerned about possible defeat and discontented about supplies of food, these Councils quickly spread within Germany. Two memoirs gave clear pictures of the situation in Germany at the end of the war,

¹ Richard B Speed III: 'Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War: A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity', (Greenwood Press, New York, 1990), p 175. Margaret McMillan: 'Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War' (John Murray, London, 2001), p 27.

² The terms are in Hugh Cecil and Peter H Liddle (eds): 'At the Eleventh Hour: Reflections, Hopes and Anxieties at the Closing of the Great War, 1918' (Leo Cooper, Barnsley, 1998), pp xxxi-xxxv.

³ AWM 38, 3DRL 6673, Item 216: 'Brief History of the Repatriation of British Prisoners of War', January 1919, for details of the movement of POWs to the UK. AWM 18, Item 9982/5/1.

and the impact of the revolution, showing that POWs had some information about what was happening there, and about progress towards the ending of hostilities.⁴

At the end of October, officers at Saarlouis heard of the troubles at Kiel. On 6 November, they were sent by train to Coblenz where the revolution had ‘broken out’. The garrison had mutinied and the town was under the control of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Council. While the transfer of control had been bloodless, troops and supplies were not being sent to the Front; guards were sent to escort the POWs to the camp, in case the population was hostile. The heavier luggage, including clothing, was left at the station; ‘the revolutionaries’ were to steal it all.⁵

On 11 November, Sanders was able to go to Coblenz on parole. He spoke enough German to discuss the Armistice with the locals who said that it would be impossible for Germany to accept its terms. He sold soap, long unobtainable in Germany, to a hairdresser at a good rate of exchange. After the Armistice was signed, acknowledging that immediate repatriation was one of its terms, the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Council instructed the officers to remain in camp ‘for a few days’. Coblenz was ‘full’ of German deserters and clashes with extremists among them were to be avoided.⁶

Next day, after selling more soap to the hairdresser, Sanders went to the town commandant to replace the stolen clothing. He explained that the ‘revolution had upset everything’ and that the Worker’s and Soldiers’ Council controlled the town; he gave an order on that body for the supply of underclothing for 40 men. Sanders found that the stores had been raided the previous day and all stock had been taken. The town commandant undertook to see what articles could be purchased locally.⁷

Officers at Clausthal were also aware of the approaching end to the war. In October, 100 British officers arrived from Heidelberg, learning something of German sentiments during that journey. POWs also heard of the exchange of Notes about an Armistice, and were able to read smuggled copies of German newspapers ‘circulating something near the truth’.⁸

While German officers at the camp ‘lost a lot of their usual arrogance’, their ORs did not seem to be overly worried: tired of the war, they welcomed its end.

⁴ Bullitt Lowry: ‘Armistice 1918’ (Kent State University Press, Kent, Ohio, 1996), p 149.

⁵ Lt RE Sanders (14th Bn att 4th ALTM Bty): AWM 2DRL/0417, pp 51-52.

⁶ *ibid*, pp 53, 54. He had learnt German to assist in escaping: see Chapter 6.

⁷ *ibid*, pp 55-58 (*passim*).

⁸ AWM 3DRL/4043, pp 253-254: Capt JH Honeysett, 47th Bn.

Workers and soldiers joined forces, set up their Councils and published pamphlets setting out their aims and objects. This revolution caused the POWs some uneasy moments until they realised that the revolutionaries were focussed on extricating Germany from 'a national debacle'.⁹

Armistice night and later

POWs knew that their immediate repatriation was one of the terms of the Armistice. Some expressed their intention of walking out across Germany but sentries were in place at Clausthal for a week before the 'prisoners' were able to leave the camp unaccompanied. On Armistice night, Honeysett and three other officers were able to bribe 'a very decent' guard with English cigarettes and soap, cut through the wire and walked to a village for a 'convivial little gathering'. Control of the country by the Councils was seen as providing a much-delayed opportunity for an expression of opinion by the people.¹⁰

Snow had fallen quite heavily and the officers were able to obtain equipment for a range of winter sports, but it was not until 12 December that they left Clausthal. They had to march to the station by a 'devious' route, as the Burgomeister did not want the town 'defiled' by their passage through it. Before entraining for the UK via Denmark, the men were addressed by a German officer who expressed the hope that they had enjoyed their stay and invited them to return under, perhaps, more favourable circumstances.¹¹

After several pleasant days in Copenhagen, Honeysett and some of his comrades crossed the 'mine-strewn' North Sea: one day, he counted 14 mines 'in dangerous proximity' to the vessel.¹²

Release

Some ORs were not released from commandos until some time after the Armistice was signed. For others, the intervention of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils was necessary for their release. A number of men said that they left Germany on passes provided by Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. As early as 5 November, on an

⁹ *ibid.*, pp 254-255.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp 259, 265, 260-264 (*passim*).

¹¹ *ibid.*, pp 265, 267, 268. Honeysett did not explain why it took so long for this camp to be emptied.

¹² *ibid.*, p 270. Pte EW Phelps (13th Bn) also mentioned that the vessel bringing him to the UK had to stop for 'old German mines': Mitchell Library Mss, 2943.

island in the Baltic Sea, guards were disarmed by revolutionaries and the camp taken over. These POWs were sent to Copenhagen via other lagers, embarking for the UK on 13 December.¹³

The diary of a 13th Bn private revealed a good deal about conditions in Germany after the Armistice, and what he did in the UK until his return to Australia. From 5 October 1918, he was at a factory in Luneberg unloading railway wagons carrying lime. While he refused to work after 11 November, ‘kicks and hits’ drove him to resume the task. On 20 November, he was sent back to Soltau lager where he waited for a month for a train: it was ‘too far to tramp it’ to a port to go to the UK.¹⁴

Another man, on commando at a coal mine, worked for four days after the Armistice. When his party went on strike, it was not fed for two days. Revolutionaries were sent for and the POWs were ordered only to undertake camp fatigues.¹⁵

When work unloading iron ore in a port stopped on 11 November, the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Council ‘asked’ that it continue: it was ‘absolutely necessary’ that this work did not stop. About a week later, these men left Germany, arriving at Leith about six weeks after the Armistice.¹⁶

After 11 November, a soldier in charge of the Help Committee was able to arrange that those in a lazarette remained until they were repatriated, rather than being sent out to various camps. He volunteered to assist in repatriating POWs and stayed behind until 24 January 1919. The Soldiers’ and Workers’ Council asked him to collect all the POWs in his area and arrange for their transportation from Germany: he found 100 men. The Germans treated him ‘very well’ after the Armistice.¹⁷

Men who refused to work were abused, food was stopped and there were no fires. More than a month later, they were sent to a lager where two men broke out of barracks. They hid in railway trucks and then boarded a train; held up by officials seeking tickets and passports, they got away and gave themselves up to Belgian authorities. They arrived in Dover on 22 December.¹⁸

The German officer in charge opened the gate of a prison yard in Belgium, telling the POWs that he had no food for them. They made their way towards Allied

¹³ AWM 30: B13.8, Pte GE Castle, 15th Bn; B13.22, L/Cpl C Guley and Pte WG Phelan, 16th Bn; B10.13, Pte FE Hardwick, 48th Bn; B13.11, Pte L Graham, 14th Bn.

¹⁴ Phelps, Mitchell Library Mss 2943.

¹⁵ AWM 30: B14.1, Pte J Ryan, 53rd Bn.

¹⁶ AWM 30: B13.22, A/Cpl J Mullins, 16th Bn.

¹⁷ AWM 30: B10.20, Pte WG Pearce, 50th Bn. He had learned German in captivity.

¹⁸ AWM 30: B10.10, L/Cpl WD Littlewood, 47th Bn.

lines, and it was a week before they met British troops at Charleroi. The Belgians fed and sheltered them on the journey, 'and gave us everything we required.'¹⁹

Another man was given a pass, but no food, and told to make for Allied lines. Until he met British troops, he was another of the many men fed by the Belgians.²⁰

Return via Holland

It is not surprising that there were some difficulties in handling the numbers of Allied and American POWs released from camps in Germany after the Armistice.

Maj JJ Hughes (32nd Bn) was detailed to remain in Holland on 'Repatriation Duties'. He noted that he had been sent to Leeuwarden to establish and take charge of a 'Concentration Camp', and listed the names of other officers and ORs retained in Holland on 'Repatriation and other duties'.²¹

Immediately after 11 November, arrangements were made by British authorities for the reception, re-clothing, feeding, medical care and embarkation of former POWs from Rotterdam. When released prisoners arrived in large and increasing numbers, even 'extensive' arrangements were inadequate for the prompt handling of so many men. Hughes said that he had made representations about concentrating AIF personnel but was told that, because of the great congestion, no discrimination could be made and that all personnel would be treated alike.

On 20 November, Hughes visited Rotterdam and was told by several of the recently arrived AIF waiting to embark that there were a number of discomforts to be borne, chiefly the sleeping accommodation. While there was a good deal of grumbling, he believed that the chief complaint was the delay in leaving for the UK. He was convinced that everything possible was done for the comfort of the men and to expedite their return, and noted that the officers and NCOs employed in this work had all been POWs and were sympathetic to the recently released men.²²

He described the arrangements at Rotterdam: ample food from Red Cross parcels, and from regimental funds sent to Germany but intercepted to feed the released POWs. Sleeping accommodation of 3000 to 4000 beds was provided in one of the sheds on the wharf. While there was not a great deal of comfort, everything was

¹⁹ AWM 30: B B6.7(2), Ptes SJ Lawlis and JA Madden, 18th Bn.

²⁰ AWM 30: B10.5, Pte GB Jochinke, 4th Pnr Bn.

²¹ AWM 18, Item 9982/4/4 (undated). He was to be at Leeuwarden from 23 November 1918 to 16 January 1919.

²² Some men did not appreciate the wait in the dock area. Impatient to leave Holland, they probably had not been briefed on the reasons for the delay.

done to provide as much comfort as possible in the circumstances. Men were confined to the docks, sometimes for three days, until they were able to embark.

Shortly after repatriation began, large numbers of released POWs began to arrive at the Dutch frontier and could not be accommodated in Rotterdam. They were therefore sent to camps of the sort that Hughes commanded at Leeuwarden. As far as possible, arrangements at these camps were the same as at Rotterdam, except that it was not always possible to provide any clothing that was needed. Food was ample and men remained in these camps until shipping was available, when they were then sent to Rotterdam, re-clothed if necessary and embarked for the UK.

Hughes seems to have been as dismissive of complaints from internees about food in Holland as he was about problems during the repatriation of POWs. One man commented that there 'seemed to be a sorry lack of organisation about our reception and treatment in Holland.' Another arrived at Rotterdam on 25 January 1919; 'there seemed to be no one who had any interest' in POWs passing through. 'English' officers were supposed to be in charge but it was three days before any notice taken of his party, and that was only because he had protested. Even then, the shed to which they were sent was very cold, and the blankets supplied were very thin. A 10th Bn soldier waited in Holland for 16 days for a vessel to take him to the UK, arriving in Hull on 11 December.²³

Through Switzerland

In addition to the internees, the AIF representative in Switzerland (Capt C Mills, 31st Bn) had some responsibility for former-POWs travelling through that country from Germany. In view of the numbers involved, the speed of repatriation and the thoroughness of the arrangements are surprising.

On 22 November, he informed London that arrangements were in hand to receive 10,000 former POWs from Germany in Switzerland, and that this number would 'probably' include some members of the AIF. The Officer in charge Interned in Switzerland considered that Mills should remain in the country for, perhaps, two to four weeks. To that date, no British POWs had crossed into Switzerland.

Embarkations or disembarkations were not permitted from trains during their progress through Switzerland, nor were ex-POWs allowed to stay in the country. Food

²³ AWM 30: B13.22, Cpl CH Plank, 16th Bn; B10.20, Pte WJ Pearce, 50th Bn; B5.33, Pte PO John, 10th Bn. See Chapter 8 for Hughes' earlier work in Holland.

and clothing were passed to the passengers from dumps on the Swiss-German frontier, and nominal rolls of Australians on any trains were obtained and passed to London. By 8 December, only nine ORs and two officers remained in Switzerland: two of the ORs were AWOL, five had the 'flu; the status of one man was to be confirmed.²⁴

Repatriation postponed

Surprising as it may seem, after their release from captivity, some junior AIF officers undertook to remain in Germany and other countries before going to the UK. As some releases from camps were delayed, these other tasks may have been used as ways of getting moving from behind the wire.

On 6 December, one officer volunteered for 'special transportation work' for the repatriation of British POWs. With two British officers, he found a 'disgraceful state' at Munster: the latrines had not been emptied since June and dysentery had broken out. There were practically no medical facilities and British NCOs stated that 90 per cent of deaths could have been avoided if proper treatment had been given. The discipline of the POWs was 'splendid'.²⁵

Two AIF officers worked for the Red Cross, one in Switzerland for a considerable period after the Armistice. When the officers from the camp in Coblenz were repatriated, Sanders volunteered to remain set up a Red Cross Relief Depot and act as a Commissioner to help in the repatriation of Allied POWs. The day the camp was cleared, 20 tons of parcels arrived; he used them to pay wages and for services received. About 18 November, he saw a German Army Corps march through the city from the Front Line as victors. This contrasted with the entry some days later of a brigade of the American army of occupation: very little notice was taken.²⁶

Many former-POWs came to Coblenz, some in poor condition. On their busiest day, 1500 men went through Sanders' facility; British POWs were sent on to Cologne and others to Mainz for repatriation.²⁷

With the replacement of the previous regime, there was a good deal of looting in Coblenz. Sanders was assured that a patrol would protect his store of food; he was

²⁴ AWM 18, Item 9982/5/1: 22, 28 November and 8 December 1918.

²⁵ AWM 30: B5.44: Lt PW Lyon, 11th Bn. He left the UK for Australia on 11 March 1919.

²⁶ AWM 2DRL/0417, pp 61, 64, 68-69. Sanders left Germany on 12 January 1919. This typed Narrative seems to be scripts from broadcasts, probably made after those given by Groves, to whom he refers on p 1. For Groves, see Chapter 2.

²⁷ Sanders, pp 63-64.

given 'a German automatic' and ammunition to defend it. The Workers' and Soldiers' Council provided him with furniture from one of the former-Kaiser's castles nearby. Before he left, the Australian was able to bluff representatives of Coblenz into reimbursing the former-POW officers for the theft of their clothes.²⁸

Another junior officer, held in a camp until a month after the Armistice, was employed for two months in the Pay and Accounts Branch, British Military Repatriation Office, Copenhagen. Although the War Office cabled for his return to the UK, the officer in charge considered that his services were indispensable and he was unable to leave until 1 February 1919. He arrived in London via Christiania, Bergen and Newcastle.²⁹

Some men were very critical of internment in Switzerland. By November 1918, a 13th Bn officer who had been there since the end of 1917 seemed not to mind. On 9 June 1918, he had been appointed as the accountant to the British Red Cross in Berne and, by special request of the Commissioner, remained until 3 April 1919.³⁰

Delays

Some other Australians were late in beginning the journey to the UK, either because they did not hear of the Armistice, or because they were not allowed to leave their commandos. At least one man took matters into his own hands.

A soldier working behind the lines, although he did not provide detailed information, was in an ironic position before he left for the UK. On Armistice Day, he got away from his commando and made for the nearest British lines. With another man, he volunteered to guard ammunition trains and dumps; German soldiers dressed as civilians were setting fire to them, others had hammered nails into petrol tanks in a train, so that only a spark was required 'to set the whole train off'. The Australians were armed with rifles and given ammunition. They met British outposts near Charleroi but, as they went from Calais to Dover on 27 November, they cannot have been guarding the trains for very long.³¹

Another man found that his work for other POWs, in the Bureau on Prisoners in Hameln, was being extended week-by-week: he was 'fed up' and decided to find his own way back to the UK. On 12 December, he ran away and travelled across to

²⁸ *ibid*, pp 66-67, 70, 80-83.

²⁹ AWM 30: B10.7, Lt JDA Collier, 47th Bn.

³⁰ AWM 30: B13.5, Lt W Stones. He left for Australia on 23 June 1919. See Chapter 8 for internment.

³¹ AWM 30: B10.5, L/Cpl WH Whitnear, 4th MG Bn.

the Channel by train without charge. He had typed, stamped and signed the enabling pass from 'GOC the X Army Corps' enabling him to do this. He noted that he was at Cologne when General Plumer received the 'English' Divisions marching into Germany. He arrived in the UK on 19 December.³²

A third soldier was on commando about 240 kilometres east of Berlin. Relying on the Germans for news, he was told that POWs were being repatriated only as shipping became available. Thus, he remained on commando until 20 January 1919. He was picked up by the British Army Medical Corps and detained at Cologne 'in consequence of complaint about the treatment of POWs by the Germans'. He arrived at Folkestone on 17 April 1919, possibly one of the last AIF POWs to reach the UK.³³

In the UK

Depending on their medical condition, POWs were sent on leave for a month after their arrival in the UK. Some men with local connections later took their discharge in the UK, but most wanted to return to Australia and were sent back as shipping became available. For some, their time away was extended by participation in the AIF Education Scheme, including any non-military employment (NME), that they had undertaken.³⁴

While it is not possible to be exact, including the former POWs about 180,000 men had to be returned to Australia. They took part in the Education Scheme that had involved perhaps 40,000 of the AIF before their departure from France and the UK.³⁵

On the morning of 22 December, Phelps was sent by train to Hamburg and reached Hull on 26 December. By 31 December, he was in London, on a month's leave, during which he travelled to Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow, arriving back in London on 1 February 1919. After some time at the AIF camp at Sutton Veny, he went to London again on 14 days' leave on 11 March and was then sent to Hurdcot camp until he sailed from Plymouth on 1 May, arriving in Sydney on 11 June 1919.³⁶

³² AWM 30: B10.7, Sgt HC Toon, 48th Bn.

³³ AWM 30: B11.1, Pte FT Swanston, 50th Bn.

³⁴ Sanders' appointment was terminated in the UK in September 1919; Plank was discharged there on 3 October 1919. For the Education Scheme, including NME, see OH, Vol VI, pp 1062-1072 (*passim*).

³⁵ 'The History of the Department of Repatriation and Demobilisation from November 1918 to September 1919' (Ede & Townsend Ltd, London, 1919), p 5. This figure can be reconciled with the number that embarked. For example, OH, Vol VI, p 1059: 165,000 troops; OH M, Vol III, p 707: 184,000; Serle, p 409: 'about 160,000 men'. OH M, Vol III, has other figures. Serle, p 409.

³⁶ Phelps, Mitchell Library Mss 2943. He did not mention any involvement in educational schemes, and stated that he was 15 years and 10 months old when he enlisted on 20 April 1916.

Illness and death

Some Australians left camps in Germany after the Armistice, but they were not to return to Australia.

Sgt HL Lake (13th Bn) was exchanged and arrived at Boston on 14 April 1918. He went straight to hospital in London, and a Statement was taken from him on 30 April. He died next day, very suddenly, of infections to the bladder and kidneys; in his unit's Roll of Honour he was listed as 'died of wounds'.³⁷

On 12 October 1917, L/Cpl WH Carr (48th Bn) was exchanged, arriving in London on 14 April 1918; a Statement was taken from him on 1 May 1918. Carr died of spinal meningitis in Egypt on 20 August 1918 on the voyage back to Australia.³⁸

At least two men reached the UK but died there of pneumonic influenza. Pte DM Rae (19th Bn/5th ALTM Bty) reached Hull on 11 December 1918. A Statement was taken from him at Ripon on 12 December, and he reported to the ARCS on 16 December. He died on 15 January 1919.³⁹

Perhaps more poignant was the case of Pte FJ Allen (53rd Bn). Captured at Fromelles, he escaped on 1 September 1918, arrived in Holland six days later and reached the UK on 5 October. He died on 25 October and, in 1920, was mentioned in despatches for his escape.⁴⁰

The return to Australia

By the end of 1918, some 93,000 members of the AIF had already returned to Australia from the UK and Egypt: 75,000 invalids and 18,000 others for 'change, duty or disciplinary reasons.' This was regarded as a considerable achievement, one that had given the AIF's Administrative HQ extensive and intimate experience in the necessary military and naval cooperation. The medical system had also built up 'an excellent working system'. All of these skills were required after the Armistice.⁴¹

On 30 November 1918, 93 officers and 2725 ORs, or 2818 men, were still in Germany. By 31 December, only 35 officers and 865 ORs were there; six weeks later,

³⁷ AWM 30: B13.5/RC W 1540412. He had been seriously wounded in the stomach at Bullecourt.

³⁸ AWM 30: B10.7/RC W 0691011.

³⁹ RC W 2230403. See Chapter 7 for those who died of the 'flu in captivity.

⁴⁰ RC POW Box 3. He did not complete a Statement. See Chapter 6 for the awards made in 1920.

⁴¹ AG Butler (ed): "The Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914-1918", three vols; (hereafter OH M), Vol III, p 706. See Bibliography for full citation. "Leslie Parker"/Angela Thirkell: 'Trooper to the Southern Cross' (Faber & Faber, London, 1934) remains one of the few accounts, however special, of the AIF's return to Australia.

only 3 officers and 29 ORs were either not accounted for or were in neutral countries.⁴²

Sixteen ships left for Australia in December 1918. There would have been insufficient time for former POWs to have finished their leave, let alone any participation in the education scheme, to return on these vessels. By late March 1919, the rate of repatriation was 'very pleasing'; many ex-POWs left the UK that month.⁴³

Some men died of the pneumonic influenza in captivity, others after their arrival in the UK. For the three months after the Armistice, the troops were subject to this epidemic: the 'greatest obstacle' with which those responsible for their welfare had to contend. Australian authorities had insisted on a greater allocation of space per man on its troopships than was allowed by Imperial standards. In spite of reduced numbers, infected men were found on transports quarantined on arrival in Australian ports. Some men died, but it is not known how many had been POWs.⁴⁴

While there were eight deaths on three transports that left the UK late in January 1919, it is unlikely that there were many ex-POWs on these vessels. Some of the five that died after 21 March could have been; by then, these men had begun to leave the UK in reasonable numbers.⁴⁵

Lieutenant General John Monash was in charge of the return of the AIF. The history of the Department of Repatriation and Demobilisation that he ordered to be prepared did not separate ex-POWs from the rest of the AIF. It noted that the task of embarking the great bulk of the force was completed in the eight months following the Armistice, instead of the 18 months that had been forecast.⁴⁶

After the war

Many unit histories were published from 1919, often by members of those units, some as late as the 1940s. They had three main purposes: to preserve wartime camaraderie, to tell of units' operational records and to commemorate those who did not return. POWs did not fit into these categories. Their experiences were usually

⁴² AWM 18, Item 9982/1/23: 12 December 1918, 7 January and 13 February 1919. Geoffrey Serle: 'John Monash: A Biography' (MUP in association with Monash University, 1982), pp 404-411 (*passim*).

⁴³ Serle, p 411. OH M, Vol III, at pp 683-722, dealt with the return of the AIF to Australia.

⁴⁴ OH M, Vol III, pp 710-712, 720; CEW Bean: 'Anzac to Amiens' (AWM, Canberra 1993), p 519.

⁴⁵ OH M, Vol III, p 720.

⁴⁶ 'The History of the Department of Repatriation and Demobilisation from November 1918 to September 1919' (Ede & Townsend Ltd, London, 1919), p 7. Demobilisation was 'imposed' on Monash by Prime Minister WM Hughes, on 21 November 1918: p 6. Serle, p 411.

omitted and they were sometimes only referred to in a statistical section at the end of a history.⁴⁷

Biographies have been written about senior AIF officers and commanders, such as White, Blamey, Gellibrand and Elliott. VC winners and some others who earned decorations for gallantry were also chronicled. Little is now known, however, about the later lives of most of the junior officers and ORs, including the former POWs.⁴⁸

Some ex-POWs died early: one died not quite 32 years old in 1922, another just after his 36th birthday. Others lived long lives: one to 79 years, another was 84 years old when he died in 1969. A variety of experiences awaited them: one died in an aircraft accident in 1929 before he was 32 years old; another transferred to the RAAF in 1921; a third served in the AN&MEF for seven months in 1920/1921, and at least one served again in the later war.⁴⁹

Footnotes in the official histories leave the impression that many returned soldiers may have died earlier than contemporaries who had not embarked for service: ex-soldier associations naturally took this view. Butler referred to a belief in the concept of soldiers 'burnt-out' by their service. In the early 1930s, 'a determined move' was made to obtain recognition of the handicap of war experience for pension purposes.⁵⁰

In an attempt to resolve the issue, calculations were made after the 1933 Australian Census, as a result of which the Statistician observed that:

⁴⁷ See, for example, (Capt) E Gorman: 'With the Twenty Second: A History of the 22nd Battalion AIF' (HH Champion, Australasian Authors' Agency, Melbourne, 1919), Appendix 2, p 109; (Capt) FC Green: 'The Fortieth: A Record of the 40th Battalion, AIF' (Government Printer, Hobart, 1922), Appendix A, p 214; Capt C Longmore: 'The Old Sixteenth' (History Committee, Battalion Association, Perth, 1929), Appendix 3, p 207; captured officers are listed in Appendix 6, p 212.

⁴⁸ Of the men in a famous photo, B Company, 29th Bn being briefed on 8 August 1918, four were killed in action or died later and something is known about the later life of three, including the officer. Of the remaining ten men, only their dates of death are known; see WH Connell: 'Seventeen Men', *Wartime: Official Magazine of the Australian War Memorial*, Vol 3, Spring 1998, pp 47-48.

⁴⁹ Information on the fate of some former POWs can be found in the ADB, unit histories, the OH, AWM 140 and Private Records at the AWM: Capt HC Anthony (7th Bn); Lt PW Lyon (11th Bn); Capt EW Cornish (2 Sqn AFC); LtCol TR Marsden (5th MG Bn); Lt HA Ferguson (2nd MG Bn) and Capt D Dunworth (15th Bn). It is surprising that, given the seriousness of his wounds, Capt WA Cull (22nd Bn) was two days from his 45th birthday when he died in 1939.

⁵⁰ OH M, Vol III, pp 816, 817. There were also moves to recognize 'burnt-out' soldiers in NZ, Canada, the USA and the UK.

...mortality amongst returned soldiers...exceeds that of a body of males of the same age constitution drawn from the general population by about 13 per cent.⁵¹

There is no indication that, apart from considering the records of all surviving members of the AIF, any allowance was made for the experiences of former POWs.

Since the early 1990s, two dictionaries of Australian military history included articles on First World War POWs; they were also included in an article in the Centenary History of Australian Defence. Most of the coverage of the subject in the first two volumes was, however, on Second World War prisoners of the Japanese.⁵²

Additional unit histories and other studies have also been published using AWM 30 Statements to tell of the experiences of First World War POWs.⁵³

⁵¹ *ibid*, p 818.

⁵² Ian Grant: 'A Dictionary of Australian Military History' (Random House, Sydney, 1992); Peter Dennis *et al*: 'The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History' (OUP, Melbourne, 1995); Joan Beaumont: 'Australian Defence: Sources and Statistics', Vol VI of "Australian Centenary History of Defence" (OUP, South Melbourne, 2001).

⁵³ See among many examples: Ronald J Austin: 'As Rough as Bags: The History of the 6th Battalion, 1st AIF, 1914-1919' (RJ & SP Austin, McCrae, Vic, 1992); Robin S Corfield: 'Don't forget me, cobber: The Battle of Fromelles, 19/20 July 1916 – An Inquiry' (Corfield and Company, Rosanna, Vic, 2000); Robert Kearney: 'Silent Voices: The Story of the 10th Battalion AIF in Australia, Egypt, Gallipoli, France and Belgium during the Great War 1914-1918' (New Holland Publishers, Sydney, 2005). The inclusions have not been universal. Ross McMullin: 'Pompey Elliott' (Scribe Publications, Melbourne, 2002), p 593, noted that Pte V Mullin (7th Bn, AWM 30: B5.21) was blinded, but not that he was captured.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSIONS

From May 1916 to November 1918, about 3850 members of the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF) were captured on the Western Front. This was a small group by comparison with the number of British POWs, over 170,000, or the Russians: perhaps as many as 2.4 million men. The AIF soldiers were treated as if they were British; many of them saw themselves as such, even if they were conscious and proud of themselves as Australians. Combined with the small overall number, this probably led to some uniformity of experience within the group, even if the treatment given to officers was superior.

Two international Conventions governed treatment of POWs during the First World War; during the war, the German and British Governments negotiated two bilateral agreements. That none of these documents was able to provide complete protection to British/Australian prisoners probably says more about conditions in Germany than about policies to mistreat them. There was clearly some ill-treatment of individuals, some wounded men and those forced to work, but the Kaiser's Germany was not that of a generation later.

This Study used some of the Statements completed by about two-thirds of these men, generally on their arrival in the UK. Some were later to complete memoirs, and a few wrote books on their experiences. This material, together with Australian Red Cross papers, was the basis of this Study.

Because so much more attention has been paid to the POW experience in later wars, these men have been neglected in accounts of Australia's participation in the First World War.

According to Butler, men captured between 1916 and 1918 were less than 2 per cent of the force as a whole; even the 2295 captured in 1917 was only 2.64 per cent of the AIF at the time. Nevertheless, combined with the numbers of killed and wounded in battles such as Fromelles and Bullecourt, POW numbers could contribute to morale problems within units, if only in the short-term. Quite apart from loss and

grief for their families, AIF casualties had a significant impact on the Australian political scene from 1916.¹

While it happened in many ways, surrendering could be complex, dangerous and difficult. Although there was some shame about its use, Australians did show the white flag in some situations. An incident at Fromelles showed how units could be inter-mingled in action, leading to confusion and reduced control by officers and NCOs. While Bean dealt with this incident in less than six lines, even the Statements from the captured men did not give a definite picture of what had happened.

There was brutal behaviour in the aftermath of combat: according to some POWs, wounded Australians were shot by the Germans at Bullecourt. The Official Historians seemed to approve of this action.

Captured individuals were often searched and interrogated just behind the lines but, after Bullecourt, some men were selected for questioning at a collection centre further back. While front-line German troops generally treated prisoners well, there were variations in how POWs were treated as they went back to Germany.

Some men were threatened and, while violence does not seem to have been widely used in the interrogation process, the Germans did their best to extract information from their prisoners. Some means were obvious, but AIF officers sent to Karlsruhe seemed not to know that their conversations may have been recorded.

The wounded were collected from the battlefield as soon as practicable. Wounds were dressed and what food was available was generally provided. While the seriously wounded were retained in hospitals behind the line for varying periods, most of the newly captured then began their journeys to camps or hospitals in Germany.

Behind the lines and in hospital trains, treatment for the wounded was usually of a high standard, but there were some complaints of shortages of anaesthetics and bandages. Such complaints were more common in the hospitals in Germany as many materials were not available, even in 'ersatz' or substitute forms.

Contacts with the German people varied. Not surprisingly, Statements by former POWs showed a range of experiences and treatment. While men were treated badly, whether in hospital, in mines or on farms, it is surprising that so many of the AIF were able to mention good experiences in Germany.

¹ See Chapter 1.

Germany's system of guarding and feeding POWs resulted from the nation's structure. Prisoners 'belonged' to the corps that had captured them and were sent back to its area. This placed corps commanders in powerful positions in such matters as the location and staffing of camps. More importantly, this decentralised system meant that Berlin had to deal with many authorities to implement the international standards to which Germany had committed itself.

Although POWs were not given the same priority for food as the German civilian population, and while rations were poor, the Germans seem to have provided what food they could. While this was probably just adequate for survival, it was generally grossly deficient in quantity and quality for men of whom hard physical work was demanded in all weathers. Many men mentioned the date on which they began to receive Red Cross parcels; they also often noted whether the parcels arrived regularly and intact. Many men stated that these were the difference between survival and starvation, and the gratitude of both ORs and officers to the Red Cross was one of the most constant themes in Statements.²

Some Australians were aware that the Germans were short of food, and a number of Statements referred to offers from guards to buy surplus rations because they could not feed their families on their rations. Statements also made it clear that guards were aware of the quantity of food received via parcels. While this had some impact on individuals' morale in a small number of cases, the undeniable shortage of food was only one factor in the German request for an armistice in 1918.

Unwounded Australian ORs were generally sent to camps in Germany and held for about a month before they were sent out on commandos, or working parties. They undertook a variety of jobs, with varying degrees of success. Work may have been physically hard, it was often contrary to the provisions of The Hague Convention (1907) and there was undoubtedly some ill-treatment, but it may have protected some men from the depression and neurosis caused by long-term confinement. This was so prevalent that, as early as July 1917, the term 'barbed wire disease' was used in a German-British agreement.³

While officers did not have to work, and NCOs sought to avoid work outside lagers, the Germans went to considerable lengths to ensure that other ORs did. Some

² The other was the quality of medical treatment, hardly surprising given the number of men who were wounded before they were captured.

³ Especially in 1917 and 1918, some men were held in working parties behind the lines, and some were not sent to Germany.

NCOs chose to join commandos; they believed, probably correctly, that it was easier to escape from them.

Some memoirs have left the impression that, for officers at least, escaping from Germany was their sole ambition. While this was generated to some extent by Second World War experiences, it was clearly not a universal view. 'Success' has generally been measured by whether a man or group reached neutral territory, usually Holland. 'Unsuccessful' attempts served a number of purposes, including acquisition of skills and knowledge about routes. Above all, they helped to occupy time, giving another defence against the results of captivity.

Many men were incapacitated by wounds, and it was impossible for them even to leave a hospital bed. Others including most officers seem to have been too closely guarded to consider the matter. Considerable preparation was required for a successful escape: acquiring maps, compasses, civilian clothing and currency; saving and storing sufficient food for the journey to a neutral frontier, and perhaps learning some German. Some men returned from captivity because they were lucky, or able to take advantages of opportunities given to them. Some escapes, particularly those from immediately behind the German lines, were very dangerous. Many men were not able or prepared to take risks.

Although many AIF officers attempted to escape many times, only two were successful. More than 40 ORs were ultimately to reach neutral territory because many were forced, or volunteered, to work outside lagers. Outside the wire, there were more opportunities to escape, and it often required more than one attempt before a man was successful. While it might be thought that the AIF experience was aberrant, even more Canadian ORs were successful than their officers.

More than half the men in the Sample were wounded when captured; others became sick or were injured in accidents in German custody. While there were instances of poor treatment, brutality and neglect, it seems that the Germans tried to fulfil their obligations under the Geneva Convention. Shortages of anaesthetics and bandages and, in some cases, poor treatment did not assist recovery.

Especially after the negotiation of a bilateral British-German Agreement in July 1917, sick and wounded men could be exchanged to the UK, or interned in Holland or Switzerland. For those who were exchanged, it meant an early return to Australia. While they were not behind wire, internees often exchanged one set of restrictions for another. There were shortages of food and other goods in Germany's

neutral neighbours, and in Switzerland part of the population was hostile to the Allies. Accommodation in these countries was not always of a high standard.

Because of limited training and educational opportunities, there was little for the men to do. There was a suspicion that the Swiss ensured that they got a good deal from their internees for little money.

The signing of the Armistice on 11 November 1918 found the Allies unprepared for the return of their men. While there were some problems in Holland, most Australians were in the UK within a reasonable time after that date, to have some leave and begin returning to Australia early in 1919.

Just as men died of pneumonic influenza in Germany before the Armistice, so some of the AIF died before they could return to Australia. Others died of the effects of their wound, or of illness on the voyage home.

Former POWs were treated as part of the AIF, able to take educational opportunities with the rest. The return to Australia was a much smoother operation than had been forecast or hoped.

POWs have been treated very differently in the various official histories of Australia's wars. Men captured during the war in South Africa (1899-1902) were generally not held long; they were not treated badly but seem to have received little attention. Some aspects of the approach taken by Bean and Butler can be seen in the official histories of Australia's involvement in conflicts after 1919, but the later histories included considerable detail about the experiences of POWs.⁴

Those captured in the Second World War could not be ignored, whether from campaigns in Greece, Crete, and the North African desert or from the Royal Australian Air Force or the Royal Australian Navy. Overall, the treatment of those captured by the Germans and Italians in the later war seems to have been similar to that experienced by those captured between 1916 and 1918: there was some ill-treatment, brutality and neglect of Allied POWs, but only a few instances seem to have been organised and systematic.

The largest group of Second World War Australian POWs, much larger than the total number captured from 1915 to 1918, was taken by the Japanese. It was not

⁴ Peter Edwards: 'Continuity and Change in the Australian Official History Tradition' in "The Last Word? Essays on Official History in the United States and British Commonwealth" ed Jeffrey Grey (Praeger Publishers, Westport, Connecticut, 2003), p 75.

possible to ignore the way men were treated on the Burma-Thailand Railway. At best, those who were kept elsewhere were starved, if they were not brutally treated. None of these men were or could be blamed for what had happened to them: they were both martyrs and victims, in ways that most of the First World War prisoners of the Germans were not. Their experiences now dominate the popular view of the POW experience, even if the barracks at Changi in Singapore and the Railway often seem to be the same place.

Memories of what had happened to these men were still fresh at the time of the Korean War and, although few Australians were captured in the later conflict, they were not treated well. While this war has often been overlooked, these men were certainly not excluded from the history of Australia's participation.

Official histories have been seen as 'the first, but not the last word' about the involvement of nations in Twentieth Century wars: as Higham observed, like Biblical quotations, they must be used with care. Perhaps the series that Bean edited, and more importantly the six volumes that he wrote, 'provided the starting point and indeed the agenda' for research into Australian military history for too long.⁵

It has also been suggested that, more generally, Bean's influence dominated or limited strategic discussion in Australia, and that his volumes exercised 'a somewhat negative hold' on the teaching of military history in Australia.⁶

If these volumes were 'excellent' and their influence 'pervasive', they also 'stifled further research' so that it is not hard to see why First World War POWs were neglected by later authors. Bean mentioned the capture of some men in his narrative, and put a few of their subsequent experiences in footnotes. This was where he generally isolated facts and incidents that were not consistent with the triumphant national story that he was framing: being captured did not fit into that story.⁷

This is consistent with the small amount of interest in the Australians captured by the Germans between 1916 and 1918 and, although they produced some memoirs,

⁵ Robin Higham (ed): 'Official Histories: Essays and Bibliographies from around the World' (Kansas State University Library, Manhattan, Kansas, 1970), p 3. David Horner: 'Military History in Australia' in "Australians on Peace and War" ed Hugh Smith (Australian Defence Studies Centre, University College, UNSW, ADFA, 1987), p 12. Gavin Long, the editor of Australia's Second World War OH, was included with Bean in this comment.

⁶ Greg Lockhart: "'We're so Alone': Two Versions of the Void in Australian Military History", *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol 33, No 120, p 390. Peter Dennis *et al*: 'The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History' (OUP, Melbourne, 1995), p 89.

⁷ Horner, p 12. Alistair Thomson: "'Steadfast until death?' CEW Bean and the Representation of Australian Military Manhood", *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol 23, No 93, October 1989, p 465.

these men have been ignored in many books about the First AIF. Three reasons could be advanced to explain this fact.

The first is based on consideration of the ideas of the era. Paxton argued that Nineteenth Century wars in Europe became 'rare, localised and short', fought by professional armies that did not impinge much on their societies. The First World War lasted far longer than had been dreamed possible for urbanised and industrial societies. Other historians have noted that the emergence of the industrial economy and the application of industrial technology to the battlefield, together with the fact that, until the end of 1917, weaponry favoured the defensive over the offensive. These factors ensured that war was going to be a terrible experience for any participant.⁸

The resulting four years of 'industrialised slaughter' left little of the previous century's legacy unaltered. It was understandable that many Europeans felt that their civilisation, with its dreams of peace and progress, had failed. The ideas of the Nineteenth Century about war, and captivity in particular, exerted their influence for another generation.⁹

Men of the AIF and others captured during this conflict were judged against beliefs derived from these earlier, smaller European wars, and there seems to have been an element of blame and disgrace attached to their fate. There was a tendency for POWs to be seen as 'a flaw in the heroic myth of men fighting to the death rather than surrendering.' Morton suggested that captivity could be seen as a taint on a soldier's honour, expunged only by evidence that it was due to the sad fortune of war. In addition, the deaths of so many others in battle could be seen as a reproach to the men who had survived, however painfully, the German camps.¹⁰

It is easy now to see how many of these ideas were irrelevant after 1914, but it was fortunate for many men that The Hague Convention of 1907 was one piece of the previous century's legacy that survived as a guide to the treatment of POWs. Although the adoption of the 1929 Geneva Convention was evidence of some change, it would take the much larger numbers of POWs in the Second World War, and

⁸ This argument was advanced as part of the background to the rise of European fascism; see Robert O Paxton: 'The Anatomy of Fascism' (Allen Lane, London, 2004), p 29. Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson: 'Was Britain's sacrifice necessary?' in "The Great War: Gains and Losses – ANZAC and Empire", ed Craig Wilcox (AWM and ANU, 1995), p 165.

⁹ Paxton, p 29; Richard B Speed III: 'Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War: A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity' (Greenwood Press, New York, 1990), pp 5-6.

¹⁰ 'Desmond Morton: Silent Battle: Canadian Prisoners of War in Germany, 1914-1919' (Lester Publishing, Toronto, 1992), pp x, 137, 142.

infinitely worse treatment for many of them, for these older ideas about capture to be replaced.¹¹

Bean, Butler and other official historians reflected Nineteenth Century values which the First World War made largely obsolete. It is simplistic to see their histories as showing a callous disregard for the fate of the POWs. In keeping with the outlook of the time, however, these works had a predominantly operational focus: once they had left the battlefield, prisoners were ineffective soldiers and were therefore ignored.

Bean was explicit that his primary focus was the front line. In Volume I, he stated that he had been present at most of the AIF's battles while they were 'actually happening' and was able to collect first-hand accounts. In Volume III, he was more direct: the limited nature of the field made it possible 'to reconstruct the fighting from the point of view of the front line', and to record within a few weeks 'the actual point where battles are won and lost.'¹²

The other two reasons for neglecting this group are related to Australia's experience of the war.

Few of the AIF were captured; on their return to Australia, they dispersed and were absorbed into the community. The younger men sought to establish themselves; those that could took the opportunities that were available. What is now called 'survivors' guilt' probably played its part in suppressing their stories. More importantly, the experience of the war tended to be kept within groups of former soldiers: those that had not served were excluded. Men tended not to express emotion and did not talk publicly of harsh experiences often or willingly.

In the climate of the 'trenchantly masculine ideology of heroism' produced by Australia's First World War experiences, there was little room for POW stories. They told of the other side of war: of men who began as fighters but were captured, fought no more but suffered. Nearly one in five of those who had embarked were killed in battle; many others were physically and emotionally damaged. In the Sample on which this Study was based, for example, there were many amputees among the former POWs; many that were not captured also lost limbs. Many others had served,

¹¹ This Convention could not have included provisions to deal with the consequences of a long conflict driven by technology.

¹² CEW Bean (ed): "The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918", 12 vols, various authors, (Angus & Robertson Ltd, Sydney, 1921 to 1942): Vol I, p x; Vol III, p v.

had had difficult times; there was little prospect of the stories of different experiences being heard.¹³

Finally, while for many years they were on shelves in public and private libraries, Bean's works were 'more frequently referred, even deferred, to than actually read'. The size of the four volumes about the Western Front, where most Australians served, and the remorseless detail would have deterred most potential readers from undertaking the task and persisting in reading them thoroughly.¹⁴

Bean consulted former soldiers and took some note of their views. Many provided material to the Australian War Memorial in the 1920s and 1930s in response to his requests. Most veterans, however, probably only looked at coverage of events in which they or their units were involved, just as many later readers generally only looked for particular or family names. Bean was writing for an audience that had had little encouragement to think of the war in other than personal terms and the role of individuals. In any event, POW experiences were confined to a few footnotes.¹⁵

In 1946, Bean published 'Anzac to Amiens', a one-volume condensation of the OH. While the 400 prisoners at Fromelles were mentioned, the 1200 at Bullecourt were not. That an officer was mortally wounded in the latter battle was included, but not the fact that he died in captivity. POW numbers were included in a table setting out the British Empire's contribution during the war.¹⁶

That Australia's ideas, about the First World War and POWs, might have begun to change was symbolised by the play 'The One Day of the Year' by Alan Seymour, completed for the 1960 Adelaide Festival of the Arts. That it was rejected for performance showed that any changes were only partial.¹⁷

Although there had been opposition to participation in previous wars, one of the effects of divisions over involvement in the Vietnam War from the late 1960s may have been greater interest in earlier conflicts, including the First World War. This increased interest was perhaps also related to greater numbers of history graduates from Australian universities, and to the waning influence of the 1914/1918

¹³ Robin Gerster: 'Big-noting: The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing' (MUP, 1992), p 20. Samuel Hynes: 'The Soldiers' Tales: Bearing Witness to Modern War', (Penguin, New York, 1997), p 232.

¹⁴ Dennis *et al*, p 89. Vols III to VI of the series of 12 volumes were originally published between 1929 and 1942.

¹⁵ Edwards, pp 77, 75. Unit histories were published from 1919, usually ignoring POWs: see Chapter 9.

¹⁶ CEW Bean: 'Anzac to Amiens' (AWM, Canberra, 1993), pp 235, 333-334, 532. It has been republished unchanged six times. It was not part of the OH: Edwards, p 70.

¹⁷ Seymour also published a novel with the same title in 1967.

generation. Still the First World War POWs were ignored. It is surprising perhaps that Indigenous Australians POWs were included in a 1973 article.¹⁸

Until publications in the early 1990s, then, Bean's work seems largely to have defined Australian views of the First World War and of its POWs in particular. Since then, their experiences in captivity have been included in a number of unit histories and other studies.

Because of the climate in which he was writing, and the triumphal national view he was advancing, Bean excluded the small group of POWs from his narrative. It was understandable, therefore, that the experiences of this group were overlooked and then forgotten. It has been suggested that POWs came to have 'a special place in Australian mythology' but, if this was so, it was not because of the experiences of the First World War men.¹⁹

In February 2004, a memorial to Australia's POWs was dedicated in Ballarat, not in Canberra. It remains to be seen whether the focus of interest will move from its concentration on prisoners from the Second World War, especially of the Japanese. It is by no means certain that the story of AIF prisoners of the Germans in the First World War will be incorporated into the nation's myths. While a range of material about these men and their experiences is available, they are still among the most neglected men in Australia's military history.²⁰

¹⁸ CD Clark: 'Aborigines in the First AIF', *Army Journal*, No 286, March 1973, pp 21-26. Little if any military history was taught in Australian universities at that time.

¹⁹ Joan Beaumont in Dennis *et al*, pp 472, 473.

²⁰ Examination of the site www.ballarat.vic.gov suggests that this memorial is part of a tourist focus for the city.

NOTE ON SOURCES AND NUMBERS

Records in the AWM

In Series 30, the Australian War Memorial (AWM) holds typed statements from 'repatriated' Australians captured on the Western Front from 1916 to early November 1918. Private Records, diaries, memoirs and other material from a limited number of men, together with Australian Red Cross Society (ARCS) records, are also included in its holdings. With the indispensable Official Histories (OH), these were the prime sources of material for this Study.¹

The AWM also holds the surviving files of the AIF's Administrative Headquarters in London, containing material about its POWs.

Between April 1916 and November 1918, about 3850 Australians were captured on the Western Front. Of this number, 267 died of wounds after capture and 70 died of disease or accidents during captivity: about 9 per cent of the total.²

In his 1988 thesis, Roger Noble established that 'about 2010' former POWs completed Statements, as they have been called, about 57 per cent of the men who returned from captivity. Many were very brief and were signed by a number of men who were in the same unit, captured in the same action and who remained together in captivity. Noble examined these Statements and showed that there was a high correlation between their numbers and those of the POWs captured in the same action.³

He listed five engagements that produced the highest number of Statements. Apart from Dernancourt, these were occasions when the Australians were attacking German positions:

(First) Bullecourt, 11 April 1917	1170 captured	673 Statements
Fromelles, 19/20 July 1916	400 captured	284 Statements
Dernancourt, 5 April 1918	290 captured	153 Statements
Mouquet Farm/	About 498	135 Statements
Pozieres	captured	94 Statements ⁴

Thus, those captured at Fromelles and Bullecourt were about 40 per cent of the total number of POWs, but they produced about 47 per cent of the Statements.

¹ AWM 139 is an Index to the AWM 30 Statements. As shown in the Bibliography, other institutions also hold some memoirs and diaries.

² AG Butler (ed): *The Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914-1918*, Volume III, 'Special Problems and Services' (AWM, Canberra, 1943), Table 26, p 896, Table 27, p 897 and Table 31, p 901. Hereafter 'OH M, Vol III'. Butler only gave total figures, did not differentiate between officers and ORs and did not mention those that died of wounds.

³ RJH Noble: 'Raising the White Flag: The Surrender of Australian Soldiers in France during the Great War'. Unpublished BA (Hons) Thesis, 1988, University College, ADFA, pp 5, 6. He stated that 'about two thirds' of returning POWs made Statements, but his calculations appear not to have made allowances for the 337 men, or about 9 per cent of the total number, who did not survive captivity.

⁴ *ibid*, pp 7-10 (*passim*), Table 1.2, between pp 12 and 13. Those captured at Pozieres and Mouquet Farm were taken in operations between 20 July and 3 September 1916. Three Australian Divisions, 1st, 2nd and 4th, all attacked these places twice, each with large numbers of casualties. See below for the breakup of the Sample of AWM 30 Statements by year of capture.

In addition to these large numbers, individuals and small groups of the AIF were also captured, eg when surprised by the Germans in outposts or venturing too far forward and into a German position. A number of Australian Flying Corps (AFC) officers were also shot down, captured and imprisoned with other AIF officers. A small group of medical and other personnel of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (AN&MEF) was captured by the German raider SMS *Wolf* in the Pacific Ocean in August 1917 and eventually reached POW camps in Germany, to be treated in the same way as members of the AIF.

This explanation of their purpose was at the top of many Statements:

The Australian War Records Section is engaged in collecting material to enable a history to be written after the war. Many points that are at present doubtful may be cleared up from statements by men who were taken prisoner. These statements should indicate the man's own personal experiences, and if any statement from hearsay is included, it should be so stated.⁵

While completion of Statements may not have been enforced, the Australian War Records Section (AWRS) only wanted the 'most interesting and informative'. In fact, only the 'interesting' ones were typed and sent to AWRS.

Perhaps this explains why there are Statements from only about two-thirds of returning POWs. Prepared under the AWRS' guidelines, the principal focus in Statements was on operational matters, how an individual or group was captured, rather than what happened later. Thus, many officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) concentrated on how they were captured rather than describing their time as POWs.⁶

Because 'personal experiences' could be interpreted broadly, many Statements included material on time spent as a POW, without which this Study would not have been possible.

UK Statements

Some AWM 30 Statements were filed with another, printed document. Although both contained similar material, the accompanying document was quite different to the typed AIF Statement: printed with a legal appearance, page-numbered and with a different serial number for each individual. Typically, the soldier's personal details: full name, regimental number and unit were set out at the top; then place and date of capture, whether wounded or not, and age/occupation. At the end of each document, there were a few remarks about the man. These statements were prepared under the authority, and made available by courtesy, of the Secretary of the Prisoner of War Committee, responsible to the (UK) War Office.⁷

⁵ See Appendix 1 for these Statements and the AWRS, from AWM 16, Item 4376/50/2. This explanation was generally found on Statements taken during the war, rather than those taken from men arriving in the UK after the Armistice.

⁶ NCOs: lance corporal/corporal/sergeant/staff sergeant/warrant officer.

⁷ AWM 16, Item 4376/50/2, dated 22 February 1918. There were no comments by 'examiners' at the end of UK Statements taken from AIF officers.

These UK Statements, as they have been called, were prepared from the narratives of POWs that had escaped from captivity, or returned to the UK following exchange or internment. While they often included an amount of detail not found in the AIF Statements, they concentrated on conditions during captivity. They were relatively uninterested in the circumstances of capture, and often simply mentioned that a POW had escaped from Germany on a particular date.⁸

Diaries/Memoirs/Books

Most men did not write books or memoirs, but some former POWs such as L/Cpl Arnold Mason (14 Fd Coy Engrs) kept diaries at the time and wrote them up in more detail on their return to Australia. Capt JH Honeysett MC (47th Bn) had his memoirs typed and bound in the early 1930; Lt RE Sanders (14th Bn/4th LTM Bty) had his Narrative typed. Pte RT Ayres (13th Bn) wrote his memoirs, noting that he was 'not attempting to write fiction' and that 'all these happenings can be verified.' Pte HL 'Mert' Thomas (30th Bn) spoke of his experiences in 1986. Pte Don Fraser (13th Bn) and Pte Fred Peachey (47th Bn) also told their stories late in their lives.⁹

After their return to Australia, Pte TE Taylor (14th Bn), Pte Frank Hallihan (21st Bn), Pte H Horner (1st MG Bn) and Capt WA Cull (22nd Bn) published books of varying lengths about their experiences. Cull's book was used extensively in this Study because it set out his experiences in more detail than most other former POWs.¹⁰

Some of those who did not complete Statements left other records, including an Indigenous Australian, Pte Douglas Grant (13th Bn), whose papers from his time as Secretary to the British Help Committee at Wunsdorf-bei-Zossen camp, near Berlin, are in the Mitchell Library.¹¹

In 1930, Sgt WC Groves (14th Bn) broadcast his experiences as a POW for a Melbourne radio station and, between 1932 and 1934, published this material in 'Reveille', the official journal of the NSW RSL.¹²

⁸ It should be noted that, in some cases, AWM 30 only included UK Statements. See Pte C Beresford (51st Bn): AWM 30, B11.3. Copies of both AIF and UK Statements can be found in the section from p 200.

⁹ PRO1877. 3DRL/4043: JH Honeysett: 'Aussies in Exile', 1931. PR89/136: hand-written by Ayres, untitled but headed '1935'. Colin Burgess: 'Freedom or Death: Australia's Greatest Escape Stories from Two World Wars', (Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1994), pp 24-36, and Hugh V Clarke and Colin Burgess: 'Barbed Wire and Bamboo: Australian POWs in Europe, North Africa, Singapore, Thailand and Japan' (Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1992), pp 3-12. As there were no footnotes or references in the latter works, it has been assumed that Burgess interviewed Fraser and Peachey: see the latter book, p vii. They were not in the Sample.

¹⁰ TE Taylor: 'The Peregrinations of an Australian POW' (EW Cole, Melbourne, nd). Frank Hallihan: 'In the Hands of the Enemy: A Record of the experiences of Frank Hallihan, 21st Bn, in German Prison Camps' (Robt W Jones, nd). H Horner: 'An Australian Prisoner of War in the Hands of the Hun' (Second Edition, VK Jones & Co Ltd, Perth, 1920). Horner did not provide a Statement. W Ambrose Cull: 'At All Costs' (Australasian Authors' Agency, Melbourne, 1919).

¹¹ Mitchell Library, Mss 2766; Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB): Vol 9, 1891-1939, Gil-Las, pp 76-77.

¹² AWM 2DRL 268; 'Reveille', Vols 5-7 (*passim*); ADB: Vol 14, 1940-1980, Di-Kel, p 340.

ARCS Records

The AWM holds ARCS files that were a vital source for this Study: the 32,000 Missing and Wounded of the AIF, and a second series for those who became POWs. It also holds papers of the redoubtable Miss ME Chomley, and the surviving papers from her organisation.¹³

POW NUMBERS AND THE SAMPLE

Numbers of AIF POWs

According to an AIF Statistical Return and Nominal Roll compiled to 11 February 1919, 3853 members of the AIF were captured serving with the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) on the Western Front:

148 officers (3.84 per cent of the total), and
3705 other ranks (ORs).¹⁴

In 1972, the ACT Branch of the Military Historical Society of Australia published figures showing 148 officers and 3713 ORs were captured with the BEF, a total of 3861 men. For the sake of consistency, and because it lists the number of POWs from each unit, it was used as the source for numbers captured from formations and units.¹⁵

This data showed the great differences in the numbers of POWs taken from various units of the AIF. The force was structured and used by the BEF as an infantry force, with supporting specialist units: artillery, engineers and medical units. While many other units also lost men as prisoners, it was not surprising that infantry battalions suffered the greatest losses.

The AIF battalion with the highest number of battle casualties with the BEF, the 25th, only lost 2 officers and 38 ORs as POWs; 7th Bde, of which it was a part, lost a total of 3 officers and 149 ORs. The four battalions of 4th Bde, 4th Div, lost 40 officers and 1218 men: rather more than the full strength of a battalion. It is not surprising, therefore, that the largest number of POWs came from two 4th Bde battalions: the 13th lost 13 officers and 280 ORs and the 16th 11 officers and 399 ORs.¹⁶

¹³ Both sets of files have the same AWM accession number: 1DRL/428. The Wounded and Missing files have been digitised for electronic access. The work of the ARCS is mentioned in OH M, pp 987-991(*passim*). The State Library of South Australia also has a collection of ARCS papers.

¹⁴ AWM 18, Item 9982/1/23 (Secret File). In a 1919 compilation by Admin HQ AIF, London, 18 officers and 73 OR POWs were shown as 'Corps Troops' and 'Lines of Communication' (LOC) personnel.

¹⁵ AWM 18, Item 9982/1/23. There was no separation of NCOs from other ORs. The Nominal Roll is not on the file. 'Australian Imperial Forces Data 1914-1920', Military Historical Society of Australia, ACT Branch, 1972, p 15 (hereafter 'AIF Data'). Figures from the latter appear to have been used by Jeffrey Grey: 'A Military History of Australia' (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990) and by NG McNicol: 'The Thirty-Seventh: History of the Thirty-Seventh Battalion AIF' (Modern Printing Co, Melbourne, 1936), p 289.

¹⁶ Total battle casualties for 25th Bn were 133 officers and 3339 ORs: AIF Data, p 5. It was one of the eight battalions disbanded in September 1918, following three others earlier in 1918. After 13th and 16th, the other two 4th Bde battalions (14th and 15th) had the next highest totals of POWs. The 4th Div

There were considerable variations in numbers captured from the battalions: Forty two of the 60 infantry battalions were represented in the Sample. Only in three of the 60 battalions were no men captured. Another 19 had less than ten captured. Six of the latter were represented in the Sample.¹⁷

In this Study, it was inevitable that the experiences of the large numbers captured at Fromelles and at Bullecourt dominated. It was important to ensure that smaller groups from units other than the infantry battalions were also represented, and the following groups were included in the Sample:

Divisional signals and a range of engineer and transport units.¹⁸
As noted above, personnel captured by SMS *Wolf* in the Pacific in 1917.
Fifteen Australian Flying Corps (AFC) officers. Only one was exchanged from this group, and they were sent to a surprisingly small number of camps.¹⁹
German-Australians.
A group of 15 AAMC personnel captured at Mouquet Farm in August 1916 and later exchanged together.

Many AIF units published histories after the war, but POWs were often omitted. Sometimes they were mentioned in passing: in the history of 14th Bn, some of those captured at Bullecourt were listed in the text. Unusually, 16th Bn listed its officer POWs in an Appendix; it also included POWs in its extensive casualty statistics. Some of the unit histories published in the last 15 years have included information on experiences in captivity, drawn largely from AWM 30 Statements.²⁰

The Sample

For this Study, 701 of the total of 2010 Statements were examined in some detail and used under headings corresponding to the chapters above:

Circumstances of capture
Food
Life in the lagers
Work
Escapes
Treatment of the wounded and sick

machine gun and pioneer battalions lost more POWs than those units in the other divisions: AIF Data, pp 5-11 (*passim*).

¹⁷ See Chapter 1 for the number of POWs taken from each of the divisions.

¹⁸ Divisional machine gun battalions have been treated as infantry units as they were recruited initially from the battalions. They also operated with and in direct support of the infantry.

¹⁹ For only one officer to be exchanged/interned was unusual, but only three of this group were wounded when captured. Most became POWs in 1918, especially from September onwards. Many had already served in other AIF units before they joined the AFC: see OH, Vol III, p 183 and fn 75.

²⁰ Newton Wanliss: 'The History of the Fourteenth Battalion' (The Arrow Printery, Melbourne, 1929), p 211. C Longmore: 'The Old Sixteenth' (History Committee, Battalion Association, Perth, 1929): Appendix 3, p 207; Appendix 6, p 212. The Bibliography indicates unit histories that mention POWs. See, for example, Ronald J Austin: 'Cobbers in Khaki: The History of the 8th Battalion, 1914-1918' (Slouch Hat Publications, McCrae, Vic, 1997); Appendix 6: Guests of the Kaiser, pp 304-305. Neville Browning: 'The Blue and White Diamond: The History of the 28th Battalion, 1915-1919' (Advance Press, Perth, 2002); Appendix G: Nominal Roll of Prisoners of War, pp 587-588.

Exchange/Internment
Return to the UK/Australia.

Substantially more than 701 Statements were assessed because, as noted above, many were signed by numbers of men from the same unit who were captured and remained together. Such Statements were usually brief and contained little about circumstances of capture or conditions during captivity. They were especially likely from men captured at Fromelles and Bullecourt.²¹

In this Sample, Statements were recorded from 285 men captured in 1916, 318 from in 1917 and 98 from those captured in 1918. According to Butler, 995 Australians became prisoners in 1916, 2295 in 1917 and 558 in 1918. These recorded Statements were therefore from 28.64 per cent of the 1916 men, 13.86 per cent of those captured in 1917 and 17.56 per cent of those captured in 1918.²²

Officers and NCOs were over-represented in the Sample. Of the 701 Statements used in this Study:

79 (or 11.1 per cent) were from officers;
141 (or 20.1 per cent) from NCOs, and
481 (or 68.8 per cent) from private soldiers.²³

Wounded or not, officers were separated from the ORs shortly after capture and were treated quite differently. Whether or not they were forced to work outside their lagers, NCOs continued as leaders of those with whom they found themselves. Statements from officers and NCOs were generally more detailed than those of most private soldiers.²⁴

Junior officers were greatly over-represented in this Study:

2/Lt: 10
Lt: 29
Capt: 22
Maj: 2
LtCol: 1.²⁵

The wounded, 358 or more than 51 per cent of the total, were also over-represented: the large numbers captured at Fromelles and at Bullecourt were more likely to be wounded than not. Many 'wounded' ORs had not been seriously harmed and did not remain in hospital long; they were soon sent to lagers and, if they were not NCOs, to work.

²¹ There were some variations in the names of places where men said they were captured.

²² OH M, Vol III, Table 37, p 908. As noted in Chapter 1, these figures represented 2.11, 2.64 and 0.85 per cent respectively of the AIF on the Western Front for those years.

²³ While they were both ORs, there was a considerable difference between the responsibility and the status of a sergeant and a private even in the supposedly democratic AIF.

²⁴ See, for example, the concern of Sgt R Batteram (31st Bn) for the welfare of Pte RW Ingham (21st Bn): AWM 30, B16.7.

²⁵ For the purposes of comparison, the 15 AFC officers were excluded from these figures. Including them would have further increased numbers of 2/Lt (by 2), Lt (12) and Capt (1). One AAMC Maj, captured on the SS *Matunga*, was also excluded.

After capture, the more seriously wounded were separated from their comrades. They were treated differently, and saw things that their lightly wounded or unwounded comrades did not. Their sometimes quite detailed accounts of the treatment, both medical and general, told a surprising amount about conditions in war-time Germany.

If they were later exchanged or interned, the wounded were also able to see varying amounts of a neutral nation. Whether by design or not, the UK Statements tended to be longer than those prepared for the AWRs; sometimes they included detail on conditions in Switzerland and Holland.

Almost inevitably, Statements from 4th Div units were over-represented in the Sample, just as 3rd Div was the source of few Statements: 4th Div saw a great deal of fighting. It was therefore likely that, just as they had high total battle casualties, so its units would have large numbers of POWs and higher numbers of Statements.²⁶

It was in the interest of combatants to recover their nationals during the war. Processes were established by which the sick and wounded could be exchanged and, for the seriously wounded, this could happen reasonably quickly. After July 1917, those that had been POWs for more than 18 months could be interned in a neutral country.

Of the 701 Statements used in this Study:

115, or 16.4 per cent of the Sample, were exchanged to the UK via Holland, and
66, or 9.41 per cent of the Sample, were interned either in Holland or Switzerland before returning to the UK.

Most of the AIF prisoners remained in captivity until the Armistice was signed in November 1918. A total of 87, or 12.41 per cent of the Sample, attempted to escape. Only 37 men, or 5.28 per cent of the overall Sample, escaped from Germany, often after earlier attempts:

1 officer, or 2.70 per cent;
10 NCOs, 27.03 per cent, and
26 privates, or 70.27 per cent of this group.

A further 50, or 7.13 per cent of the Sample, attempted to escape:

14 officers or 28 per cent;
6 NCOs, 12 per cent, and
30 privates or 60 per cent of this group.

Clearly, groups within the AIF were under-/over-represented in this Study. Allowing for the fact that officers did not have to work, the experiences of this group of Australians seem to have been similar. For example, almost all relied on Red Cross

²⁶ See Chapter 1 for consideration of this issue.

parcels for survival, many were harshly treated and many moved several times during their captivity. They have all been neglected. Recording more, or less, Statements would probably not greatly have altered the picture that emerged.

Some features of the Sample

This Study collected a great deal of material about the men in the Sample. Much is about the AIF and not strictly relevant to a study of POWs, but the following provides some additional information.

Many men had already seen a great deal of action, on Gallipoli and on the Western Front, before they were captured.

At least one had served in the Boer War 1899-1902, and 11 had served in the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (AN&MEF) in German New Guinea.

Some had been wounded in action previously; others had received decorations for gallantry before they were captured.²⁷

Of the 79 officers in the Sample, 64 (or just over 81 per cent) were promoted from the ranks of the AIF. Of the latter, 24 were commissioned from within their units without attending an 'officer training unit'.²⁸

Usages

The accuracy of some of the matters set out in the Statements is debatable. Some spelling, of names in particular, was strictly phonetic, and foreign place names were often misspelt. Some men did not know, or could not remember, the names of their officers. With these reservations, the Statements have been accepted for what they are: the views, expressed at the time, of the men who experienced these things.

The Statements were not memoirs, and detail was often lacking. Where memoirs, diaries or books have been found, they have been used to supplement the Statements and Red Cross material.

To assist in establishing the credibility of individuals, and to indicate what happened to them, some biographical material, eg. place/date of capture, whether wounded or not, dates of return to the UK and/or Australia, has been provided.

There have been some changes to the system of 'staff duties' used by the Australian Army since 1914-1918. For example, '1st Div', '1st Bde', '1st Bn' and 'WOII' (rather than 'CSM') have been used in this Study.

Unless specified otherwise, regardless of what was in Statements, 'Fromelles' and 'Bullecourt' refer to battles on 19/20 July 1916 and 11 April 1917 respectively. Where there have been changes to names of places, 1916-1918 usages have been preferred. Variations in the names, and spelling, of some places have been retained: eg. Senne/Sennelager, Strohen/Strohn/Strohenmoor.

²⁷ As noted in Chapter 6, a number of the Sample received decorations in 1920.

²⁸ Those promoted via a training unit represented 30.4 per cent of the total and 37.5 per cent of those promoted from the ranks. Nine of the remaining 15 were commissioned from the militia. See OH, Vol I, pp 42, 48-56, 82; Vol II, pp 412, 421-422; Vol III, pp 52-54, 295-296; Vol IV, pp 119, 281, 293-294, 482-483, 561-564, 656-657; Vol VI, pp 19-24 1082-1084, for Bean's views on the commissioning of officers.

Appendix 1 to Note on Sources and Numbers

AWM 30 STATEMENTS

In September 1917, a number of Australian prisoners arrived in the UK from internment in Switzerland. Capt JL Treloar of the Australian War Records Section (AWRS) decided to obtain statements from them about the circumstances of their capture. He 'thought such information might help to clear up present doubts as to what actually happened in certain cases.'¹

On 2 October 1917, he wrote to (then) Major General CBB White, Chief of Staff to 1 ANZAC Corps in France, telling him that these statements had been collected and sending him 'a couple of typical ones' for an opinion on their value. Treloar included an extract from a letter in which he had sought views on:

whether such Statements should be obtained from all repatriated POWs or only from officers, warrant and non-commissioned officers (NCOs); whether the questions asked needed to be changed, and whether copies of the Statements should be forwarded to units in the field. Distributing them would enable the comrades of the former POWs to learn something of the latter, 'and would be an opportunity for this section to keep in touch with units.'²

From October 1917, the AWRS received statements from repatriated or escaped POWs. On 26 November 1917, the AIF's Administrative HQ in London advised that copies of the statements were being sent to relevant units.

On 22 February 1918, the AWRS wrote to the Officer i/c Records, Admin HQ AIF, expressing concern that the statement previously arranged by the Section was not being used. The AWRS stated that the circumstances of capture 'are of far greater historical value' than details of the treatment a POW received during captivity. The printed statements being received 'appear to give prominence to the latter'. The Section hoped that statements would continue to be obtained as in the past.

On 27 February 1918, Admin HQ replied, noting that these 'printed statements' were made available by the Secretary of the Prisoner of War Committee, responsible to the War Office for such work. It pointed out that a 'competent interviewer' was working on the latter documents, and drew the attention of the AWRS to the improvement in the latest manuscripts. It noted that the War Office document would be received first sometimes, but that the AIF Statement could also be expected. The Officer i/c Records concluded by asking for any suggestions that might add historical value to the (AIF) statements.

In reply, on 2 March 1918, the AWRS believed that the statements that HQ AIF was obtaining were quite suitable, and it was not possible at that time to make any suggestions to improve them. By 25 March, it had asked that an additional question, about the officers seen before capture, where they were and what they were

¹ What follows is a digest of AWM 16, Item 4376/50/2.

² The file does not include either the full text of Treloar's letter, or any reply from White.

doing, be added to the list of those asked of repatriated or escaped POWs. On 4 April 1918, AWRS was informed that this question would be added to the list.

In a note to Treloar on 11 June 1918, LtCol AG Butler asked that clarification be obtained from AAMC personnel about 'with respect to health conditions and treatment of sick and wounded: also to sanitation.' AWRS wrote to Officer i/c "B" Records on 25 June 1918, passing on this request, noting that LtCol Butler was 'carrying out special work with regard to the AAMC historical war records'.³

In reply, on 28 June 1918, the AIF's Admin HQ expressed the view that incorporation of the material sought by LtCol Butler in the statements 'would not be altogether politic.' There seem to have been discussions about this matter between the two bodies, as the Minute went on: 'Consequently, your suggestion that all AAMC Prisoners be referred to Colonel Butler will be adopted from now onwards.'

A few weeks later, the Officer i/c Records wrote to Maj JJ Hughes, the AIF Representative in Holland, drawing his attention to the practice of obtaining from all repatriated and escaped POWs statements of 'their experiences, circumstances leading up to capture etc.' A sample was included, and copies would be passed to 'Historical War Records Section, Defence Melbourne and others interested.' Hughes was asked to provide a statement of his experiences, and it was suggested that interned officers and men could prepare such statements in their spare time. When internees were repatriated, to have done this would save work in the Admin HQ.

Records wanted the most interesting and informative statements possible, without restriction on length and including as many points as possible. These statements would be an 'important feature of the Australian War Museums' (*sic*). They had already thrown important light on otherwise obscure details of important operations.⁴

On 24 August, Hughes noted the requirements set out by Records. The form that had been enclosed was to be duplicated and distributed to all ranks, with instructions for the requested information to be provided.

Earlier, Capt C Mills, the AIF Representative in Switzerland had been thanked for providing a detailed statement that was of 'great assistance for record purposes.' It was suggested that future statements from internees be made in the form of the guide attached to his letter. This would help to make them uniform, and ensure the recording of information of particular value to both Records and the Historical Section.⁵

The Officer i/c Records wrote to AWRS on 28 December 1918, asking whether copies of all statements of experiences made by repatriated POWs were still required. While wishing to continue to supply these statements, 'the shortage of typing power' made preparing copies a serious matter. While Records could continue to supply copies of 'the more interesting statements', it sought to eliminate 'the hundreds of more or less commonplace' records of experience.

³ What follows has been extracted from AWM 16, Item 4376/50/4. It contains similar material to Item 4376/50/2. Butler was to be the Official Historian of medical aspects of Australia's war.

⁴ AWM 18, Item 9982/4/4, dated 1 August 1918.

⁵ AWM 18, Item 9982/5/1, dated 13 July 1918. The statement came from Pte JF Ulliyott, 15th Bn.

Treloar replied on 8 January 1919, noting that statements by repatriated POWs had been 'of the greatest value in clearing up many points' left obscure by unit records. He reminded Records that obtaining statements from POWs 'was initiated upon the suggestion of this Section'. He wanted statements from all ex-POWs, but whether they were typed or not was 'immaterial.'

While almost all AWM 30 statements were typed, many were not signed, particularly after the Armistice in November 1918. Treloar wrote a note for the file on 18 January 1919, following a discussion about this matter with an officer of "B" Records. He had been told that 'difficulty' was being experienced in obtaining statements. The people employed by Records for this work were not always qualified, and the material collected frequently needed editing. Records arranged for 'interesting ones' to be typed and sent to AWRs.

The original, hand-written/signed statements were filed by Records. Treloar pointed out that these would be required as historical evidence, and asked whether there would be any objection to his Section obtaining them 'eventually'. Because they were required 'merely' to assist locating other POWs mentioned in these documents, it was proposed to ask for the statements after Records had completed its work with the returning POWs.

The explanation of the purpose on top of some Statements included reference to 'the man's own personal experiences'. In spite of Treloar's emphasis on the inclusion of material on the circumstances of capture, this seems to have been interpreted as allowing material on experiences in captivity. Without these Statements, it would not have been possible to tell something of the story of AIF soldiers captured on the Western Front.

SOME EXAMPLES OF AWM 30 STATEMENTS

Pte T Simpson, 25th Battalion
Pte C Beresford, 51st Battalion
Pte T Ensor, 16th Bn
Capt JE Mott, 48th Bn

C O N F I D E N T I A L.

Statement made by Repatriated Prisoner of War.
Taken at No.1. Rest Camp, Dover. 12.12.18.
Original Manuscript filed with Records.

Administrative Headquarters,
Australian Imperial Force,
"B" Records Section.

20th December, 1918.

REG.NO. 504.
RANK. Private.
NAME. SIMPSON. T.
PLATOON. No.6.
COMPANY. "B" Company.
BATTALION. 25th Battalion.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF CAPTURE.

(a) Date. 29.7.16.
(b) Place. POZIERES.

I was in the second wave of the attack on the enemy trenches in front of POZIERES. The attack was launched at midnight on July 28, 1916. We reached our objective. I was captured alone before the enemy counter-attacked. I was in the blind trench when taken. This, I thought, was the German trench. A Sergeant instructed me to go along the trench and investigate. During the investigation I ran into a party of Germans and became a prisoner of war. I saw a number of men killed but did not recognise any of them.

OFFICERS SEEN DURING ACTION.

Captain. Nix, 25th Battalion. I saw this officer just before we attacked.

AFTER CAPTURE.

I was kept in FRANCE at CAMBRAI for three days and then moved to DUISM in GERMANY. I remained here for ~~one~~ month and was then sent to HONNINGS where I was put to work in a chemical factory. I was the only Australian there. I worked there until February 1918. During that time I was treated badly. I was there for five months before I got any clothes; those I had were rags and in a filthy condition. I could not get a bath for eight weeks. The barracks we were billeted in were in a filthy condition and our bedding was crawling with vermin.

I was made to work in all sorts of weather and when I refused was made to stand to attention against a wall for nine hours without any food. The food issued to us was uneatable and not fit for human consumption.

My Red Cross parcels came to hand about the latter end of September 1918, they arrived fairly regularly and in good order. These parcels saved my life. On one occasion a representative of the Red Cross visited the camps. I think he was a Swiss. He told us that it was one of the worst camps in GERMANY.

On February 28 I left this camp and was taken to HENDRIVILLE where I was employed brickmaking. I was treated well here. I never saw any Australians after I left DULMEN Lager.

About a week after the Armistice was signed I was sent to SAARBRUCKEN and then on to METZ. I was the only Australian with this party. Many of the prisoners of War were in a very weak condition. I arrived in CALAIS on December 10 and sailed for DOVER on December 12, 1918.

(Sgd) No. 504 Pte. T.Simpson.

Witness. (Sgd) E.Fleeter, Lieut..

5 15 33

No. 953.

Name, Rank, No., and Regiment.
Home Address.

Age and Profession.

Capture. Sept. 3, 1916.

Caudry Hospital. Sept. 5
—Oct. 28, 1916.

Charles Beresford, Private, No. 4461, 51st Australians, Hotel Edelweiss, Mürren.
25, Alexander Road, South Freemantle, West Australia.

Present age: 20. Occupation before war: Apprentice boilermaker.

I was wounded and captured on 3rd September 1916 at Mouquet Farm on the Somme. I was hit on the back of the head by shrapnel and unconscious off and on for two or three days, and my sight was almost gone at first and is still affected a little. I was not conscious of all that happened to me during the first day or two; it may have been the day after. I was wounded that the Germans picked me up and took me to a dressing station, and from there I was sent in a freight waggon on straw by train to Caudry Hospital. I can remember nothing of my treatment at capture or during these first two days.

At Caudry the hospital was filled with British and German wounded. I have no idea of the numbers. I remained there from about 5th September 1916 until

about 28th October 1916. The doctors treated us well. The nurses and orderlies were also attentive. The hospital was in what had been a warehouse or factory, and was comfortable and the beds good.

The food was nothing to complain about. I was on light diet, and got rice, apples, in addition to the regular meals of soup, and bread and jam and coffee. Sanitary arrangements were all right. The German wounded seemed to have just the same treatment as us, and both British and Germans were in the same wards. I think I had an operation there when I arrived, but was not conscious during that period and could not say for certain. My clothes were all taken away when I arrived at this hospital, and on leaving I only had a pair of trousers and tunic and hospital shirt issued to me and had to borrow a pair of boots from another British soldier who was a stretcher case. I had no socks. I asked for other clothing and it was refused. Other men had to travel without boots and had only light hospital slippers on: their boots had been taken from them on arrival and not given back. The bedclothing was sufficient, and I think the sheets were changed weekly.

I was allowed to send several postcards from Caudry, but heard afterwards that none of them reached home. They were addressed to my home address previously given.

Journey. Oct. 23-29, 1916.

I was sent about 28th October 1916 from Caudry, in a very comfortable Red Cross train, on a bed, to Göttingen. The journey may have taken about 1½ days. We were well treated on the train by doctors and nurses.

Göttingen Camp Hospital.
Oct. 29—Nov. 12, 1916.

At Göttingen I was sent to the hospital, about 10 minutes' walk from the camp, and remained there until 12th November 1916. I was in bed all the time until about a couple of days before leaving.

There were French, Russians, Belgians, and British at this hospital, but I could not estimate the numbers. As regards the medical treatment, I think that I was looked after fairly well, but I saw other cases in the same ward that did not seem to receive proper attention.

Men with running wounds would sometimes not have them dressed for a week. This may have been due to the carelessness of the German orderly in not calling the doctor's attention to the cases that required dressing. The nursing was practically all done by our own men, British soldiers taken from the camp to act as hospital orderlies. There was only one German orderly to each hospital but holding about 50 men, and he gave us very little attention. There were no nurses.

We were accommodated in fairly good wooden huts. The beds were badly filled, often having pieces of wood and nails amongst the shavings with which they were filled. We never had any straw. They were very uncomfortable.

I had no parcels arrive for me there, and the hospital food was so bad that I had to live on what the British soldiers in the camp sent to us out of their parcels. The hospital diet was as follows:—

Light diet, as at first ordered:—

Three very small rolls of bread for the day.

7 a.m., one cup of coffee.

12 noon, soup, very thin, and no nourishment.

6 p.m., one cup of coffee.

On regular diet the only difference was that I got a ration of the ordinary bread instead of the small white rolls. Sanitary arrangements were fair. I saw no difference in treatment of nationalities. I don't know any of the doctors' names. I had no operation there.

I was in bed nearly all the time, so the only clothing supplied was a clean shirt every week, until just before I came away, when I got a full outfit of German civilian clothing, a suit of clothes, two shirts, two pairs of socks, one pair of boots, two suits of underclothes, and a cap. The bed clothing in this hospital was sufficient and the sheets changed weekly.

I received no letters or parcels during my stay at this hospital, others who had been there a good while got theirs regularly. I was allowed to write four postcards and two letters a month. I have nothing to complain of particularly and did not hear of any cases of cruelty.

The discipline was usual, and I heard of no serious punishments.

The American Embassy sent no representative to Göttingen whilst I was there, but one had been there before I arrived. I was never asked to join the Irish Brigade, and I never heard of anyone who had joined it.

I saw no cases of insanity amongst prisoners. I was never asked to assume German nationality. In the short time I was there there was no great difference in the general treatment of prisoners. I never heard of a camp in Germany where prisoners were not allowed to write or receive letters.

Leaving Göttingen Hospital on 12th November 1916 I was sent by passenger train to Cassel, a short journey, no food supplied en route, and there was placed in the camp hospital, where I remained for two or three days before being sent to Konstanz.

Cassel Camp Hospital.
Nov. 12-15, 1916.

At this hospital any necessary medical attention was given. We were accommodated in well-built wooden huts. Food was similar to what we got in Göttingen hospital. Sanitary arrangements were all right.

There were only British for exchange in this hospital at the time I was there, say, about 600. I had no clothing supplied there and did not ask for any.

Bedding was only two blankets, no sheets or pillow cases. Beds were softer to lie on and more comfortable than at Göttingen. I got no letters or parcels there and being only two or three days at this hospital cannot give much information about postal arrangements, treatment, or discipline.

Journey. Nov. 15-16, 1916.

I was sent from Cassel about 15th November 1916, by passenger train to Konstanz, and think the journey took about 12 hours, and we got no food by the way, only the ration of bread and sausage and butter we carried with us.

Konstanz. Nov. 15-27,
1916.

At Konstanz I remained until about 27th November 1916.

Any medical treatment necessary was attended to. We were housed in barrack buildings, and were comfortable, and the heating was all right and also sanitary arrangements. Food was quite good there. Some men who required clothing got it, but I needed none. Bed clothing was sufficient and beds comfortable. There was a good canteen where we could get beer, wine, biscuits, some tinned foods, tobacco and cigarettes, but I don't know anything about the prices. We had plenty of room for exercise in the barrack square, but during our short stay no outdoor or indoor recreation was arranged for. We could smoke both indoors and out. I heard of no epidemic there. I don't know of any religious services being held there. We received no letters or parcels there. We were allowed to write, but I don't know how often. The general treatment was good, and I saw nothing to complain of. There were no severe regulations as regards discipline. The American Embassy sent no representative there.

Journey. Nov. 27, 1916.

From Konstanz I was sent on 27th November, 1916, by passenger train to Rastatt. The journey, I think, took about 8 or 9 hours, and the food we had was only the ration, a piece of bread, that we carried with us. I remained at Rastatt from 27th November until about 19th December 1916, and was then taken to Switzerland.

Rastatt. Nov. 27—Dec. 19,
1916.

At Rastatt we were housed in an old fort, and very poorly accommodated. I had to sleep on a bag of straw on a stone floor.

The place was badly ventilated and unhealthy. There was very poor heating and the rooms were very cold during the day, and very stuffy during the night when they got crowded. About 500 to 600 British were there all waiting for exchange, and there were a lot of French civilians in another part of the enclosure of the fort. Sanitary arrangements were all right, washing arrangements moderate.

Food was moderate, not as good as at Konstanz. There was a canteen at which we could get coffee, beer, wine, sausage, biscuits, but I don't know the prices. I got no clothing there and did not ask for any. There was room for exercise, but we had no indoor or outdoor recreations.

Smoking was allowed both indoors and outside. I heard of no epidemic there. I was not in hospital at this camp. I heard of no religious services being held.

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No. 953—cont.

I received both letters and parcels at Rastatt, but they had been delayed, owing to my being moved from place to place. They arrived in good order, and I did not lose anything out of them as far as I know. We were allowed to write from there, but I don't know how often. The general treatment at Rastatt I did not consider good. A few of the worst cases were put in hospital, but all the rest, some with running wounds, others with tubercular trouble, were tightly packed in the rooms in the fort. There was no bad treatment from guards or anything to complain about in that way, and there was nothing severe about the discipline. The French civilians sent in some of their biscuits to keep us going until our parcels arrived. There was no representative from the American Embassy came to Rastatt whilst I was there.

C. BERESFORD.

Statement taken by F. C. Shillington, Lieut., 8th Batt. R. I. Rifles, Grand Hotel des Alpes, Mürren.

Opinion of examiner.

I consider the man an intelligent and reliable witness.

F.C.S.

21st July 1917.

CONFIDENTIAL

STATEMENT BY REPATRIATED PRISONER OF WAR.

Administrative Headquarters,
Australian Imperial Force
"B" Records Section
26th January, 1918

No. 2207
Rank Private
Name Ensor E.T.
Battalion. 16th

Circumstances of Capture.

- (a) Date of Capture Bullecourt 11.4.17.
- (b) Place Bullecourt.
- (c) What happened before capture

The Battalion was on the right flank and about 5 a.m. we went over the top. Our objective was the 2nd Hindenberg line and I got to this trench successfully. I was here for about 2½ hours bombing practically all the time when I was hit on the leg under the knee by a bomb. Pl Pte Dave Clarke assisted me into a German dug-out where many of our wounded had been taken. Two German Red Cross men, whom we had captured, were busy dressing here, and my wound was dressed by one of them.

Circumstances which led to Capture

About half an hour after I was put in this dug-out I heard the Germans coming along. They had driven our blokes back. Two Germans came into the dug-out and searched us for bombs, but did not take any personal belongings.

What happened immediately after Capture

We were left here and no further notice was taken of us until the 13th when we were carried to a dressing station (a big dug-out) at Reincourt. A Doctor looked at my leg and rebandaged it. I was also given some food. The food I think had been taken from our chaps as "bully" beef and Ticklers jam was greatly in evidence. We were then transferred by various vehicles to a railway station. At this station we entrained and I landed at Valenciennes where I stayed until the 28th. Here my wound was dressed twice and I received some food which was very poor.

Account of life as a Prisoner of War.

On the 28th I left and arrived two days afterwards at Munster Lazarette. At Munster things were much the same. The

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beds were dirty and attendance very poor. All the orderlies were Russians and most of the things we required were brought by our own chaps who could walk. Food was also very poor but we received some biscuits from the British Committee which helped us along until our Red Cross parcels came. At Munster the German Doctor wanted to put a ligature on the popliteal artery of the leg which had been hit. This operation I refused as I was afraid of my leg withering through lack of blood. On account of my refusal I was sent into Saltau Main camp where I was treated as an ordinary prisoner. Six days afterwards (on the 12th of July) I was admitted to Hospital there and operated on to see if a piece of metal could be removed. The metal however could not be found. On 15th August I was discharged to the camp again. I remained there until the 7th of January when I left for Aachen to be repatriated. The camp life was very dull and letters were few but those I received cheered me up considerably. Food was rotten but we relied on our Red Cross parcels. I did no work and was treated well by the Guard. The reason we were accorded better treatment than other prisoners was because we had the Guard "bluffed". If a Bosche struck one of our lads he was sure to get one back in return.

I arrived at Aachen on the 8th January and left again on the 11th. The treatment at Aachen was typical of German intrigue and meant to impress us before leaving. Here I saw the much talked of Crown Prince. He looks a smart sort of bloke and joked with a lot of the lads. We arrived in Holland on the 12th and soon after sailed for England where we arrived on the 20th. In conclusion I might say things appear to be a lot better here than in Germany.

f J Ennos

Name, Rank, No. and Regiment. Ensor, Thomas, Private, No. 2,207. 16th A.I.F.
 Home Address. Koolgardie Gold Fields, Australia.
 Place and Date of Capture. Riencourt. 11th April 1917.
 Nature of Wound, if any. Grenade wound in the leg.
 Age 20. Apprenticed to chemist.
 From 6.30 to 8.30 a.m. of 11th April, before my capture, while in the captured German 2nd trench of the Hindenburg Line, witness watched German machine-gunners in the village (as he thinks) of Riencourt, steadily firing at British wounded lying No-man's Land. The firing was regular and continuous. I watched the bullets striking the ground round the wounded as they lay or crawled from one shell-hole to another. The firing was at short range (300 yards?) and the machine-gunners could not have failed to see that their targets were wounded men, because the latter had no rifles or equipments, and some had limbs in slings. Witness cannot say whether any were killed by this firing. When a man was seen to fall, it was impossible to know whether he was hit or dropped to avoid the fire.
 Wound dressed at field dressing station by surgeon, a decent chap.
 Carried in motor ambulance to train, and conveyed by train to Valenciennes Hospital, where detained from 14th to 28th April 1917, and then on to Münster and Soltan.
 Private Mercer, of 16th Australian I.F. (whom I saw in Soltan Camp) told me he (Mercer) had been working behind the German lines in France from April to July 1917 before he was invalided (sick) into Germany.
 Mercer said they had a terrible time behind the lines. Ten times worse than in Germany. They got very little food, and no parcels from outside. They worked filling in shell holes (to enable German traffic to get along), and that sort of thing. He said all unwounded men were made to work behind the lines.

Valenciennes Hospital.
 April 14-28, 1917.
 Münster Hospital. April
 28-July 6, 1917.
 Soltan. July 6, 1917—
 Jan. 7, 1918.

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No. 1451—cont.

Mercer said that Joe Miller, of 16th Australian I.F. (who had been in the same working party with Mercer behind the German lines), was shot and killed by a German sentry while pulling potatoes out of the ground for food for himself (Miller).

When witness saw Mercer at Soltan the latter looked very thin and in poor condition.

Mercer told witness that after the agreement come to between Great Britain and Germany on the subject, the Germans removed the working parties of prisoners 30 kilometres away from the lines.

There were 6,000 Italian unwounded prisoners in Soltan Camp, who, before coming to Soltan, had worked behind the German and Austrian lines, where they contracted diseases, and whence they were invalided into Germany. They had a very bad time in Soltan Camp.

Opinion of Examiner.

This witness impressed me as a young man of excellent intelligence and entire reliability.

Further Note by Examiner.—As the result of my examination so far of returned wounded British prisoners, I have formed the impression that it is not so much our wounded as our unwounded in German hands for whose treatment the solicitude of the British Government is needed. Apparently it is the position of the unwounded British made to work under lamentable conditions which warrants anxiety. The wounded seem to be treated humanely for the most part, at any rate, by the German surgeons.

CHARLES F. MARTELLI, Examiner,
 Staple Inn, W.C.,
 2nd February 1918.

INTERVIEW TAKEN WITH CAPTAIN JOHN A. MOTT,
48TH AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.

73, Salisbury Street, Mooney Ponds, Victoria.

I am 40 years of age, and before the war was a mining engineer.

On the 11th April my battalion had orders to take the second line of German trenches at Bullecourt. I was in charge of the battalion, and we managed to get through the first line of German trenches, but as we were crossing No-Mans-Land—about 150 yards—between the first and second lines the Germans turned their machine guns on, and the greater number of the battalion were wiped out. I went back to the first line to try and get reinforcements, but whilst I was standing on the parapet, talking to the men in the first line, I was hit by a bullet in the neck, which laid me out for the time being. Previous to this I had been wounded in several places by bullets. There were a great many wounded in the trenches, which the Germans eventually retook, and it was three days before I was taken to a dressing station. During this time, however, I was given food and water.

On the third day, the 14th April, I was carried away to a dressing station. Previous to this I had not noticed any infraction of the laws and usages of war. The regiment—the Württembergers—who took me prisoner behaved very well and treated us quite fairly. They could not take me away for three days owing to the large number of casualties to which they had to attend, and the number of seriously wounded who had to be taken away before myself.

I was taken to a dressing station where my wounds were bandaged, and from there I was shifted to another dressing station, but I cannot remember the names of either of these stations. At the time I was unable to move my head, and, although not unconscious, was not well enough to take any notice of my surroundings.

Mons Hospital. April 20-
28, 1917.

The first I remember about my surroundings was when I was placed in Mons Hospital, where I landed about the 20th April. Immediately on arrival we were interviewed for information, and I was informed that I might write to my people; but as I had been struck by a bullet in my right hand, I did not trouble. This hospital was a properly equipped hospital, and, as such, the accommodation, heating, washing, and sanitary arrangements were quite good. The place was not overcrowded. Our clothes were fumigated on arrival, but they were so badly spoiled in the process that the Germans had to issue us with different clothes. The food was not bad, but I was too ill at the time to require much, so I cannot say anything definite about it.

Journey. April 28-30,
1917.

About the 28th April, two or three officers were sent, by mistake, to Hameln, a men's camp. The journey occupied about 36 hours, and we travelled in third-class carriages. The guard did not interfere with us, and we travelled in comparative comfort. We were given some soup at one of the stations at which we stopped.

Hameln. April 30—May 6,
1917.

On arrival at Hameln, with two or three other officers, I was put into the hospital which was partitioned off for us, and we were treated extra well. This was a well-equipped hospital, and again the general conditions were good. The men—it was a men's camp—were treated well, but were not issued with the same amount of food as ourselves. We were given coffee in the morning, a meat meal midday, and black bread, cheese and coffee in the evening. There was a Relief Committee at this camp which issued us with biscuits, and I was given to understand that each man had an issue of biscuits given to him every day. A German doctor was in charge of this hospital. He was an excellent man, and gave me all the attention possible. The nursing was done by Russian orderlies. I know nothing about the conditions existing in the camp at Hameln. I do know, however, that the British prisoners treated us very well indeed, and sent us in food to the hospital.

Journey. May 6-8, 1917.

On the 6th May 1917 I was sent from Hameln to Karlsruhe. The journey lasted about 36 hours. This

journey was carried out under very pleasant conditions. As a matter of fact the people at Hameln arranged for the exchange and gave us all the consideration they could. We were taken to the station by car and entrained in first-class carriages, and I have nothing to complain about regarding our treatment en route. I noticed some German Red Cross people at one of the stations we passed on this journey, but they ignored us.

Karlsruhe Hospital May 8
—June 10, 1917.

On arrival at Karlsruhe Station, on the 8th May, we were taken along to the hospital, and I can honestly say that this was the best place I was ever in in Germany. This hospital was not attached to Karlsruhe Lager. I do not know the name of the doctor who had charge, but he was a good man, most humane. We slept on iron-framed beds with spring mattresses, and the bed-linen was changed once a week. The whole place was well equipped. The sanitary and washing arrangements were excellent. Smoking was not allowed in the wards, but we managed to smoke on the quiet. Exercise was allowed, the officers being permitted to take one hour's exercise each day.

The food at this hospital was very good. It consisted of:—

- 7.30 a.m. Mug of coffee with milk, but without sugar.
- 9.0 a.m. Daily ration of black bread—about $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. Small portion of honey.
- 11.0 a.m. Plate of rice and milk and glass of hot milk.
- 12 noon. Six days out of seven fish or meat; the usual allowance was $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of meat, plenty of potatoes, and some other vegetables such as carrots or turnips; stewed fruit.
- 3 p.m. Mug of coffee.
- 4.30 p.m. Mug of cocoa, with sugar and milk.
- 6 p.m. Dish of soup, and possibly a slice of German sausage.

The cocoa and rice and milk which we had given to us here were extras for the more seriously ill patients. The cocoa was excellent.

I was in a room with three other British officers, but there were large numbers of British, French, Russians and Germans in other parts of the hospital. The different nationalities were, I believe, separated one from the other. The Allied prisoners were distinguished from the German prisoners by a badge—the officers wore this badge, which consisted of a miniature silk flag, red, white and blue, in a different or reversed way from the men. The clothes worn by the German wounded were exactly the same as those issued to other nationalities.

The sanitary and washing arrangements were excellent, and my general experience in German hospitals has been that they are well equipped and the doctors good and attentive.

I was allowed to write letters home, but up to this time I was not receiving any parcels or letters. Sufficient time had not elapsed.

Journey. June 10–12,
1917.

On the 10th June I was moved from Karlsruhe Hospital to Ströhen. We were taken in third-class carriages—quite a number of us, although I cannot say how many—and the journey lasted about a day and a half. We were well treated during the journey, and at one station were given food.

Ströhen Camp Hospital.
June 12–17, 1917.

On arrival at Ströhen I was taken to the camp hospital where I remained a few days. This hospital was just an ordinary part of the barracks, and I had to sleep on an iron-framed bed with a mattress stuffed with paper—most uncomfortable. A doctor visited the hospital about twice a week; beyond this we were in charge of British and German orderlies.

The sanitary and washing arrangements were very poor and inadequate. I cannot say how often the bedding was changed as I was not in the hospital long enough to find out.

Ströhen. June 17—? Sept.
1917.

On about the 17th June I was sent from Ströhen Camp Hospital into the camp itself. This is what is known as "Strafe" Camp, and the conditions are very bad indeed. The camp itself is situated on a miserable moor, with nothing else in view and in a very bleak sort of place. We had iron-framed beds and mattresses stuffed with straw. The sanitary arrangements were anything but nice or adequate. The water for washing

and drinking was taken from wells in the yard, right against which were cesspools. Naturally, the position of the wells did not tend to benefit the health of the camp, and about a month ago, August, there was an outbreak of dysentery. The barracks were divided by passage ways, on one side of which were rooms to accommodate two senior officers, and on the other side were rooms to hold about eight junior officers. In the rooms where there were a number of junior officers there was one officer of slightly higher rank in charge. There are stoves in the barracks for heating during the winter, but I cannot say anything about these as it was not cold enough to light them before I escaped.

British orderlies were employed looking after the officers—about one orderly to four rooms. These men had too much to do and had no time to cook our meals, which we did ourselves. The British orderlies were well treated, as being in an officers' camp they managed to get supplied to them anything they wanted in the way of food.

After I had been at Ströhen a short while my parcels commenced to come through all right. They arrived regularly and in good condition. I have occasionally known parcels take as long as five months to reach an officer, but this was not the general rule, as they usually arrived in about four to six weeks and in first-class condition. It was to me a most surprising thing that although the Germans are so short of food they did not steal anything from the parcels. It was very rarely that any were tampered with, and during all the time I was receiving my packages from home I never lost anything, and I know of only one case where a package, coming through the American Express Co., was filled with bricks instead of food; this, in spite of the many thousands I saw come into the camp. Parcels were always opened in our presence, and all tins were taken away and put into a separate room. These tins we were able to draw when required—at least we were able to draw the contents—the Germans kept the tins, just emptying the contents into our own vessels. There was a canteen at this camp, and we could buy almost anything with the exception of food and soap.

The rations issued to us by the Germans here were very bad. They consisted of: breakfast, cup of cocoa substitute without milk or sugar; midday, soup made from a kind of cockle and water, or potatoes and fish (which smelt very much and was very hard), or meat occasionally—evidently horses which had been badly blown about at the front. In the afternoon, tea made from leaves and grass; in the evening, some kind of thin soup, and perhaps a cup of coffee substitute (burnt barley). The food was totally inadequate, and if it had not been for the parcels we received from home, we should undoubtedly have starved. I forgot to mention that we were issued with a ration of bread once a week—about three lbs.—this was made with a certain percentage of sawdust, and was horrible stuff. The ordinary German black rye bread is not bad, but this was quite different.

At the canteen at this camp, we were allowed to buy as much wine as we liked. It was a poor quality stuff, very inferior, and very intoxicating. The charge for this was 11 marks a bottle; the ordinary price would be about 2 marks. I think it would be better if restrictions were put on the quantity of wine one might purchase, and it would avoid the chance of men being bayoneted.

The treatment at this camp was very bad, and I saw several cases of brutality. One day, a number of fresh officers were being brought into the camp, and, as was the usual custom, the officers already in the camp went to the barbed wire to see if there were any of their friends among them. A new Commandant had just been appointed to the camp, and the first order he issued was on the day of the arrival of these officers. Without warning the officers in the camp of his intention, he ordered four sentries to enter the wire and charge the officers back; in doing so, one of the sentries ran Lieut. Downes through with the bayonet, and he had to be taken to hospital in a serious condition. Lieut. Downes was a young medical student, and we used to call him "Doctor." Another officer was chased round the barracks by a sentry, but managed to elude him. It was the usual custom for

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officers to go to the barbed wire to see fresh arrivals, so that this order by the Commandant must have been but an act of vandalism.

On another occasion, when "Appel" was being called, it was discovered that several officers were missing. Guards were told off to search the building, and meanwhile the remainder of the officers were kept standing on parade. We were not allowed to talk or smoke. After we had been standing on parade for about 1½ hours, the adjutant of the camp came round, went into a kind of corner and lighted a cigar; he then came round and paraded in front of the English officers with his head high in the air, smoking all the time. Not content with thus insulting us, he ordered two Feldwebels to light up their cigarettes. On perceiving these men smoking, a number of the officers took out cigarettes and lighted them, whereupon they were arrested—by men smoking themselves—and put into prison.

The officers who had tried to escape, six in number (Greenhow, Byrne, of the Australians, and a very tall Canadian belonging to the Canadian Mounted Police, with three others), were caught after about three hours, and were put into prison, and when I left the camp about a month later they were still there.

Owing to the bad conditions at this camp, we had what we termed "a letter strike," that is to say, none of us wrote any letters home for at least six weeks, feeling sure that by this means we should cause enquiries to be made. In consequence of this act, a representative of the Dutch Embassy visited the camp and made enquiries into several things. Prior to the visit of this representative, the camp was all cleaned up, and everything got into as good order as possible. Many of us complained about conditions at the camp, and certain improvements were carried out after the visit: for instance, the parcel department was enlarged, and each officer was given a separate space for his tins; parole cards were issued, not only for walks, but also to officers who volunteered to go out and clear a piece of ground to make into a football field; and the cooking establishment was enlarged.

There was, as I have already stated, a camp hospital, run entirely by British and German orderlies. A doctor visited the camp twice a week. A dentist also came to the camp once a week.

One case of cruelty I forgot to mention was that inflicted on Captain Sloper. One day, whilst the officers were standing on "Appel," Captain Sloper went up to the adjutant and asked leave to go to his barrack as he felt ill. Permission was refused, and Captain Sloper was ordered back to his place. Later on, Captain Sloper approached the Feldwebel, then in charge, and requested to be allowed to leave the parade ground. The Feldwebel commenced to scream at Captain Sloper, who tried to give his reasons for desiring to leave; instead, however, of listening to what he had to say, the Feldwebel gave orders to two sentries to ram his feet and force him back to his place.

The chief punishment is solitary confinement, which, in its stricter sense, means being placed in a cell and kept without books, exercise, or parcels. In certain grades of solitary confinement, however, men are allowed to have their books and parcels and are permitted to exercise in a small enclosure. I was never in cells.

With regard to the mentality of the prisoners at Ströhen, I noticed a number of the officers getting melancholy, and I should say many were "queer and quiet," although not actually insane.

I never heard any rumours even of any camp where prisoners are not allowed to write or receive letters.

The guards at Ströhen were elderly men, nearly all, I should say, being over 40 and all more or less cripples and unfit for the front.

We used to talk to the guards occasionally, but they never mentioned to me at any rate anything about disturbances over food, but they openly admitted they were nearly starving. It was the usual thing for the guards to pick over our rubbish bin each day in order to find scraps of food. One under-officer was speaking to me one day and he told me that his total pay for a month was 20 marks, which had to support

his wife, family, and himself. He spoke bitterly about the parcels coming through for the officers, and said, "How do you think we feel when we see your parcels coming here in the thousands and we never see outside anything like the good things you get?" Butter, he told me, it was impossible to buy, and that the German people hardly knew what butter was.

The guards are naturally very sick of the war and hope it may end soon in order that they may get more food.

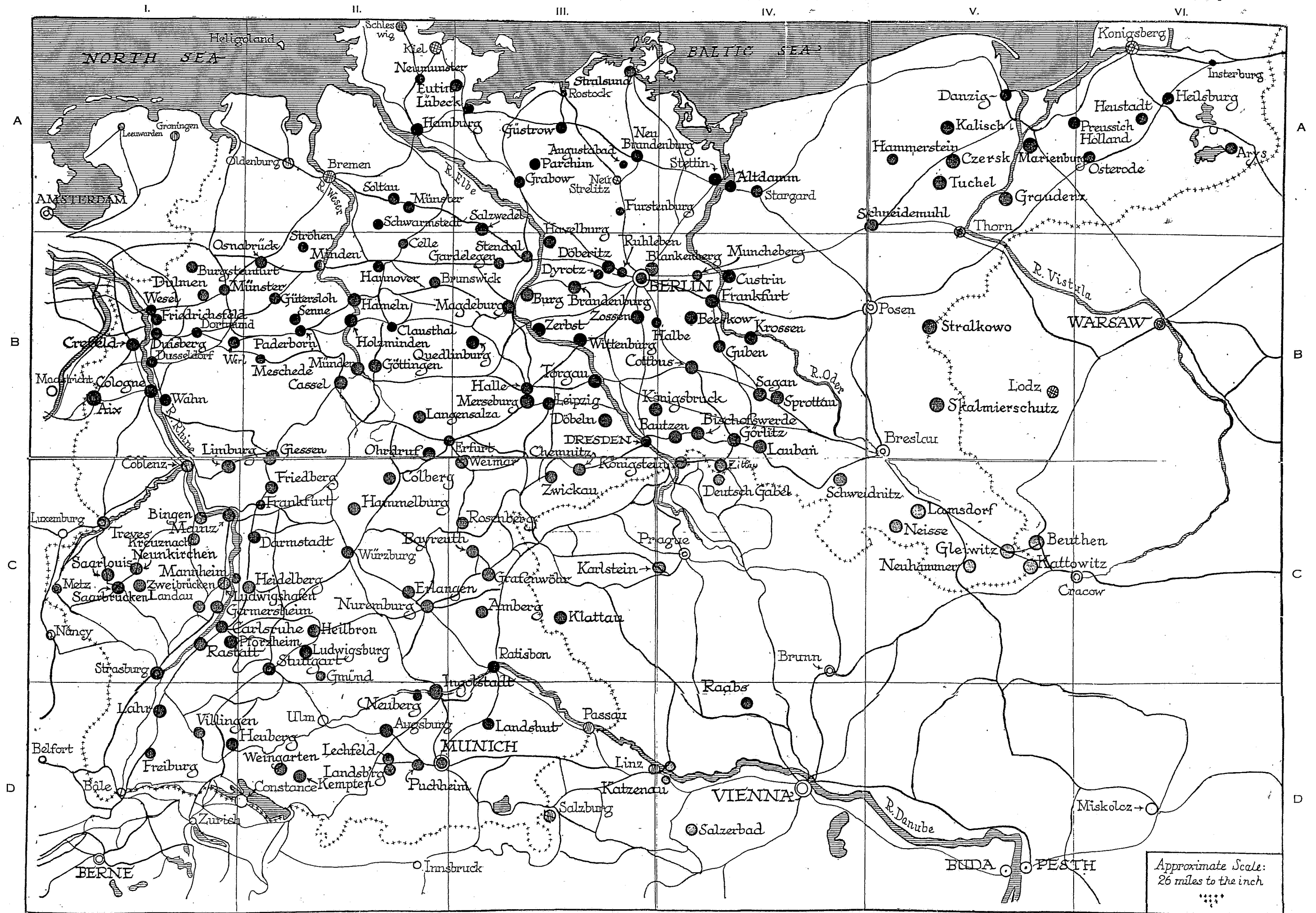
I was told by the officers who came from Crefeld to this camp that the reason they were moved was because the Germans feared a disturbance might be created by the population if they continued to see the thousands of parcels arriving for the officers.

I know nothing about aged men training in Germany.

Interviewed by T. BYARD.

15th October 1917.

MAP OF THE MAIN PRISON CAMPS IN GERMANY AND AUSTRIA



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Cpl HA Still (31st Bn): PR00753*
Pte Frank Sturrock (16th Bn): PR00122

¹ Hereafter, names marked with asterisks were included in the Sample; those marked by # were also used in this Study.

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Lt H Baker (UK officer): Mss 1285#
Pte JA Giles (53rd Bn): Mss 1842#
L/Cpl GWD Bell (16th Bn): Mss 893*
Pte WP Choat (32nd Bn): Mss 1504*
Sgt AR Compton (13th Bn): Mss 1243*
Cpl CC Benson (13th Bn): Mss 885*
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